

“Obstinate, Impertinent, Ill-Conditioned”:  
Child Labor, Exploitation and Xenophobia  
in the British Home Children Movement

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## Introduction

The Home Children movement, in which 100,000 British children were shipped overseas to South Africa, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, lasted from 1869 until the 1970s.

Proponents of the program touted the children as orphaned ‘waifs and strays’ whose last hopes for survival were open spaces and clean air beyond urban British cities. In this thesis I argue the reality of the Home Children program is much darker than how it is portrayed by its proponents and supporters, and the poor treatment of Home Children by their foster families and society as a whole is just one example in the macrohistory of immigration and anti-immigrant sentiment.

Although supporters proclaimed the children were on their way to better lives, many knowingly exploited the desperate need for labor and domestic service in the colonies. Many children were separated from siblings upon reaching their destinations and worked as indentured servants to families in their host country. Although some children led fairly happy lives in their new homes, most faced overwork, neglect, and abuse at the hands of their foster families. The Home Children movement, which lasted almost one hundred years, is little-known to most people in the twenty-first century who are not descended from a Home Child themselves. In this thesis I hope to illuminate the suffering and resilience of the children forced to partake in this program, and honor their memories by exposing the truth of what they endured.

One challenge facing the researcher on this topic is the overall lack of scholarly sources. Most of the literature on the subject comes from descendants of a Home Child seeking to memorialize their ancestors and the trauma inflicted upon them. Other information about the Home Children may be found in a chapter or two of academic works dedicated to nineteenth-

century child labor in Britain. This overall lack of scholarly sources referencing the Home Children further fueled my desire to center these children at the heart of my senior project.

This thesis investigates several issues including, but not limited to, the following: how many of the children who were adopted were truly orphans; if the program reveals any patterns about the macrohistory of immigration; why the program lasted for as long as it did; and whether there were any attempts to expose the program's abuses that resulted in a mass governmental cover-up. I seek to answer these questions with careful investigation of primary sources from the program's supporters and case studies/accounts from the children and opponents of the program. Discrepancies between the supporters' claims and accusations from its detractors and testimonies from the actual children involved, suggest the possibility of a mass cover-up of the severity of the abuses. Accounts of the general public's attitude toward the Home Children may also contribute to the macrohistory of global immigration and the separation of families. For families adopting a Home Child, did they proceed with the adoption knowing the child may still have family members back in England? Were they even informed of the child's background prior to adoption? Of the adopted children with families, how many were old enough to inform their adoptive parents they were not, in fact, orphans?

One of the most important factors motivating my research is empathy. As a person marginalized on multiple axes myself, I intimately understand the danger of forgetting or 'rewriting' history as a means of erasing the voices of the most vulnerable members of a society. The Home Children faced stigma, hostility and exploitation upon their arrival to their new home countries, problems that are still all-too-common for immigrants in Western countries today. If the stories of the most marginalized people are forgotten in the overall history of a region or

society, then such histories are not whole, truthful records of the past. I hope to augment the available information of the Home Children, investigate their voices and add to their truths.

The Home Children movement is little-known, yet examining it in careful detail may reveal much in the history and patterns of immigration and societal attitudes toward it, in the past and present. The forced separation of British families in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is strikingly similar to the separation of children from their parents at the Mexican—United States border in the twenty-first century. In order to gain a full understanding of the complexities and nuances of immigration today, it is important to look to the past for patterns that may help us move forward and foster an environment of compassion and advocacy for immigrants.

### **Conditions in Victorian London**

One of the first questions that comes to mind when one learns of the Home Children program is *why*. Why was such a program deemed necessary in the first place, a program that tore families apart and doomed many children to years of abuse and neglect at the hands of people assigned to protect them? While such a movement may be considered outlandish or unthinkable by twenty-first century standards, life was very different one hundred and fifty years ago even in an industrialized nation like Great Britain. To gain a full understanding of the motivations behind proponents of the program and the parents and guardians who allowed their children to be sent overseas, it is helpful to consider the conditions in which lower-class Victorian Britons lived, worked and died. Forced to eke out some semblance of an existence for themselves and their children, poor parents jumped at the chance to send their children away to

work on farms in the open spaces and fresh air of the colonies of Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.<sup>1</sup>

Victorian London's atrocious living conditions owe most of the foundations of its existence to the Industrial Revolution. Prior to the second half of the eighteenth century, Great Britain was stagnant and underdeveloped, a country of farmers and agriculturalist laborers struggling to make ends meet. The tide began to turn, however, around the 1780s, and inventions such as the spinning jenny, the flying shuttle, and the power loom promised great change in the daily lives of working-class Britons.<sup>2</sup> By the 1830s, there was an even greater explosion of technological advancement in Britain: the textile industry was booming, and factories were constructed in order to meet the high demand.<sup>3</sup> Roads, canals, and railroads were built to accommodate factory construction and the growing popularity of the steam engine. Slowly but steadily, London was urbanizing.

The social and economic effects of the Industrial Revolution were staggering. Farmers and laborers who previously had no other options suddenly found themselves with alternative ways to provide for their families. Factory employers needed workers to operate the machines, and someone needed to provide the labor in creating new roads, canals and railroads. Women, previously confined to the home, realized the industrial boom offered them a chance to escape

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<sup>1</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrants to Canada, 1869-1924* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Lerner R. Berlanstein, *The Industrial Revolution and Work in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), xi.

<sup>3</sup> David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Industrial Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 40.

the drudgery of domesticity.<sup>4</sup> Many unmarried women took jobs in textile factories, where they operated (often fickle and very dangerous) machinery.<sup>5</sup> Due to the demand for ‘unskilled’ labor, many rural families flocked to London and other industrializing areas. Population soared, and urbanization began to take hold in Britain.

### **Need for Alternatives**

In spite of the massive uptick in technological advancements, the effects of the Industrial Revolution were not all positive. Due to the influx of people traveling from the countryside to London, the city quickly became crowded and overpopulated. The sheer number of human beings crammed into one area had devastating consequences: disease ran rampant, the stench of untreated sewage was overwhelming, and rivers turned green from factory residue. Housing was another serious issue: people were moving to the city so quickly that landlords were unable to accommodate all of them. Many families were forced to live in filthy slums, where clean drinking water and sanitation were horrifically lacking.<sup>6</sup>

It was the lives of the children, however, that were arguably the most negatively impacted by the Industrial Revolution. The demand for manual labor in factories led to children operating the dangerous machines within, risking their own lives to do so.<sup>7</sup> Other children were forced to seek work elsewhere: girls often sold matches in the streets, while some boys shined shoes and

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<sup>4</sup> Louise A. Tilly, “Women, Women’s History, and the Industrial Revolution,” *Social Research* 61, no. 1 (1994): 117.

<sup>5</sup> Maxine Berg, “What Difference Did Women’s Work Make to the Industrial Revolution?” *History Workshop* 35 (1993): 26.

<sup>6</sup> H. J. Dyos, “The Slums of Victorian London,” *Victorian Studies* 11, no. 1 (1967): 9.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas A. Galbi, “Child Labor and the Division of Labor in the Early English Cotton Mills,” *Journal of Population Economics* 10 no. 4 (1997): 358.

searched through rubbish bins for scraps to sell.<sup>8</sup> Traveling Europeans from the mainland often commented how English children were treated like miniature adults, while social investigator Charles Booth remarked how the grade-school children he encountered were tense and anxious, appearing prematurely aged.<sup>9</sup> Parents with daughters would leave very young children or infants in their care while at work; in some cases, parents recruited boys—generally under the age of ten—to look after their younger siblings if no girl was present.<sup>10</sup> The poverty cycle had a profound effect upon family dynamics, severely altering the relationship between parent and child: it came to define a child's life stages and warped the line between childhood and adulthood until it was nonexistent.<sup>11</sup> Family links also foretold either economic success or failure, and this simultaneously shaped poor parents' expectations of their children and children's feelings about their parents.

The horrid state of urban British cities left many parents concerned for their children's well-being. Disease-ridden, dirty slums, hard labor in factories and hours in the streets selling matches were far from ideal conditions for a child to grow up in, let alone thrive. However, both parents and children understood the necessity for children to go to work: in order to make ends meet, all members of a family able to work needed to do so. Even so, many children optimistically held out hope for some semblance of a proper childhood. As neither choice was ideal, the need for an alternative option that promised compromise arose among working-class

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<sup>8</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrants to Canada, 1869-1924* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Parr, *Labouring Children*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Parr, *Labouring Children*, 15.

and poverty-stricken parents and children. It was this need for a compromise between reality and idealism that formed the basis for overseas child immigration campaigns, and ultimately, the Home Children program.

### **Origins of the Home Children Movement**

The Home Children movement did not spring out of nowhere; rather, it was the culmination of centuries of efforts to combat child homelessness and poverty in Britain. This section will also focus on two of the founders and proponents of the Home Children movement: Annie MacPherson and Thomas Baranrdo.

Beginning in 1618, poor and orphaned children were rounded up and sent overseas to the British settler colony of Virginia. In the eighteenth century, labor shortages in British overseas colonies resulted in a massive surge of child emigration to the Americas.<sup>12</sup> The 1830s, however, proved crucial in the formation of child emigration movements: changes in factory legislation and technology severely limited children's opportunities to find work outside the home.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, two new concerns emerged during the 1830s that led to a massive rise in child emigration: political concern for overall public safety and religious concern for the salvation of poor and working-class children.<sup>14</sup> Politicians saw child emigration as an opportunity to solve the problem of civil unrest and a means of salvation for some of the most vulnerable members of

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<sup>12</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 27.

<sup>13</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 28.

<sup>14</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 28.

British society. The case of internal disorder and ‘good Christian charity’ quickly became intertwined, planting the seeds of the Home Children movement.

In 1826, Police Magistrate Robert Joseph Chambers proclaimed, “London is too full of children” to the Select Committee of Emigration. Chambers insisted an overwhelming number of youths were turning to crime to make ends meet; something needed to be done to address this problem, and soon.<sup>15</sup> After 1838, the Board of Guardians discontinued youth apprenticeships, relocating parish children to workhouses. The effect was swift and dramatic: from 1834 to 1908, one in three workers was under the age of sixteen.<sup>16</sup>

The Children’s Friend Society for the Prevention of Juvenile Vagrancy was founded in 1830 in the hopes of relieving the flood of children in workhouses and living on the streets. Its goal was to send them to labor markets overseas. Through this child migration scheme, poor British youths emigrated to Mauritius, South Africa, Canada, and Australia in order to ‘prove’ to the children they did not need to resort to thievery and begging to provide for themselves and their families. In spite of a law passed in 1834 forbidding the emigration of children without their families, several hundred children from workhouses and charitable institutions alike were sent overseas to Australia, Canada and South Africa.<sup>17</sup> Exploitation of the children after their arrival led to many discrediting the Children’s Friend Society, as I shall discuss later in this paper.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1980), 28.

<sup>16</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children*, 28.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Stanley C. Johnson, *A History of Emigration from the United Kingdom to North America, 1763-1912* (London: George Routledge & Sons, Limited, 1913), 274.

By the 1840s, child poverty and crime in Britain reached an all-time high. Boards of Guardians from multiple districts declared the only solution to the problem was sending poor youths to colonies overseas. Furthermore, social unrest, such as revolutions and Chartism, also contributed to the huge uptick in child emigration during the mid nineteenth century. In 1849, numerous Ragged Schools—charitable organizations providing poor children with a free education—sent children in their care to British colonies. By 1850, however, the social climate began to settle, and the President of the Poor Law Board denounced the emigration of children as a means of providing manual labor overseas. Although child emigration via Ragged Schools declined throughout the decade, a precedent for such drastic measures had been set: the Ragged Schools proved the public was willing to send its own children across the ocean if there was a chance the overall population would benefit.<sup>19</sup>

During the latter half of the 1860s, conditions in England took a turn for the worse. A cholera epidemic hit London in 1866, and a particularly harsh winter in 1867 resulted in a poor harvest. A nationwide financial crisis loomed on the horizon, and London saw a mass increase in poverty. Workhouses again became overcrowded; the solution to this dilemma was a mass evacuation of the residents to the Canadian countryside. Most British emigrants, however, had difficulty adjusting to Canadian labor markets. In 1868, an order was passed barring emigration to Canada by those unable to provide for themselves. Following this order, any person or organization touting emigration to the colonies was considered suspect. One of the most famous proponents of British emigration was social reformer and evangelist, Annie MacPherson, one of the founders of the Home Children movement.

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<sup>19</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 29.

## Key Players

Born in 1833 to Scottish Quakers, Annie MacPherson was the eldest of three sisters. Educated in Glasgow at the Home and Colonial Training College, MacPherson decided to follow in her father's footsteps and pursue a career in teaching. At the age of nineteen, MacPherson experienced a "divine revelation."<sup>20</sup> From that point on, MacPherson became a devout evangelical, and remained so for the rest of her life. After the death of her father, MacPherson moved back to London to live with her mother, and it is there she was introduced to the true horrors of child poverty. In 1865, MacPherson took it upon herself to carry out mission work in the East End. During her time in the East End, MacPherson was invited by the Society of Friends to hold classes for young men seeking an education. Another leading figure in the Home Children movement was Maria S. Rye. A social reformer, Rye was a great supporter of emigration from England; she was particularly partial to Canada for her immigration programs. On April 15, 1868, Rye wrote to the Quebec emigration agent and informed them she had obtained considerable funding and convinced a decent amount of girls to emigrate to Canada that upcoming May. Canadian emigration agents were less than impressed with Rye, however: as an independent emigration agent, she not only threatened their authority, but their masculinity as well: she was an unmarried woman carving out a space for herself in the male-dominated "public sphere." One man in particular pushed back against Rye's efforts. William Dixon, London Agent-General for Canada, was alarmed by Rye's recruitment of workhouse girls for emigration. He

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<sup>20</sup> Clara M.S. Lowe, *God's Answers: A Record of Miss Annie MacPherson's Work at the Home of Industry, Spitalfields, London, and in Canada* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1882), 25.

wrote to her, asking for a list of the names of girls she had recruited. Rye refused.<sup>21</sup> Dixon also denounced Rye as a woman trying to perform “man’s work”, even going as far as to inspect her credentials.

It was not until 1869 that Rye fully invested in child emigration. While attending a sermon by Baptist minister W. C. Van Meter, Rye realized one “solution” to child crime was taking poor youths and instilling them with ‘proper morals’ before they had the chance to involve themselves in crime in the first place. She focused most of her attention on the emigration of young girls, who were considered just as fallible as adult women to “feminine jealousy and passion.”<sup>22</sup> She planned to recruit orphans, ‘foundlings’ and children who had been deserted five years or longer for her emigration movement. Rye had no set action plan in the event the children suffered abuse and mistreatment in their new homes, insisting their lives would be far worse if they remained in Britain.<sup>23</sup> Rye’s call to action also played on romanticized Victorian ideals of pauper children as tragic, innocent orphans: her lofty goals were perhaps more suited for the ‘literary orphans’ within the confines of fiction rather than living, breathing poverty-stricken children of Britain. Her emigration scheme was also popular as it appeared—on the surface—a very logical solution to the issue of overcrowding in workhouses and children roaming the streets.

From 1869 until 1896, Maria Rye traveled from England to Canada almost annually, recruiting almost 4,000 children for her emigration movement. Others soon followed in her

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<sup>21</sup> Marion Diamond, *Emigration and Empire: The Life of Maria S. Rye* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1999), 185.

<sup>22</sup> Diamond, *Emigration and Empire*, 200.

<sup>23</sup> Diamond, *Emigration and Empire*, 201.

footsteps: Annie MacPherson and her sister, Louisa Birt, founded their own operation, sending children to eastern Ontario and various townships in Quebec. The most successful and famous of these ‘child savers’ was “Dr.” Thomas Barnardo.

Thomas John Barnardo was born on July 4, 1845, in Dublin, Ireland, the youngest of nine children born to devout Quakers. A voracious reader, Barnardo devoured the works of Voltaire, Rousseau and Paine, declaring himself agnostic at a fairly early age.<sup>24</sup> Barnardo left his formal schooling at the age of sixteen and took up a position at a business post; he did not stay there long, as he found the job personally unfulfilling. In 1866, Barnardo entered the London Medical School with the hope of joining the Foreign Mission Field. Unfortunately, the cholera epidemic forced Barnardo to put his ambitions temporarily on hold. During the epidemic, Barnardo served as a volunteer medic in East London and witnessed horrific human suffering. One night, he followed a young pauper boy back to a ‘lay’ filled with starving children, their faces sunken and gaunt.<sup>25</sup> Shaken by this discovery, Barnardo agreed to an invitation to a foreign mission rally in London’s Agricultural Hall: he prepared a speech imploring the public not to forget about these children. In 1870, Barnardo established a children’s home, boarding and training approximately sixty poor boys until their employment or acceptance into a foster home.<sup>26</sup> He later founded Teighmore House for poor boys in 1879, and a young men’s Labour House in 1881. This Labour House began admitting abandoned and destitute infants in 1884. Barnardo planned for many

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<sup>24</sup> Gail H. Corbett, *Nation Builders: Barnardo Children in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Publishing, 2002), 14.

<sup>25</sup> Gail H. Corbett, *Nation Builders* (Toronto: Dundurn Publishing, 2002), 15.

<sup>26</sup> Corbett, *Nation Builders*, 16.

youths and infants from his children's homes to emigrate to Canada, where they would be employed as farm-hands and laborers.<sup>27</sup>

However, Barnardo's emigration movement was not without scandal. The year 1877 was particularly difficult for Barnardo: parents of 'street waifs' claimed Barnardo's photographs of their children were falsified and exaggerated in order to sway public opinion in support of his emigration movement. He was also accused by a Baptist minister of neglecting and physically abusing the children in his homes, misusing funds, and involving himself with a sex worker.<sup>28</sup> The Poor Law Act was later revised to grant local parishes all parental rights and obligations in the case of a deserted child. Two years later, a law colloquially known as the 'Barnardo Act' permitted Boards of Guardians to send child emigrants to the colonies without the express permission and consent of a child's parents.<sup>29</sup>

Between 1890 and 1893, Barnardo developed a program for boarding-out children under the age of eleven to Canada; they were expected to work for "board, clothing and school."<sup>30</sup> The young age of the children immigrating to Canada was a major point of criticism for Barnardo. Barnardo's Canadian agent, Alfred de Brissac Own, came to his defense, insisting that, while the children were young, they were not yet old enough to have formed personal attachments or habits.<sup>31</sup> Barnardo also strove for high numbers of emigration parties, for which there are two

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<sup>27</sup> Corbett, *Nation Builders*, 24.

<sup>28</sup> Lydia Murdoch, *Imagined Orphans: Poor Families, Child Welfare, and Contested Citizenship in London* (Rutgers University Press, 2006), 14.

<sup>29</sup> Gail H. Corbett, *Nation Builders: Barnardo Children in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Publishing, 2002), 31.

<sup>30</sup> Roy Parker, *Uprooted: The Shipment of Poor Children to Canada, 1867-1917* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2008), 71.

<sup>31</sup> Parker, *Uprooted*, 71.

main pieces of evidence. An increasing number of Barnardo Children were associated with the Poor Law; from 1899 onwards they made up about 12 percent of the total Barnardo Children. A letter from the head of a children's home in London—written in 1905— informed Barnardo the next party of children would not meet its desired target of 450, and the director would not be sympathetic.<sup>32</sup>

In an ironic twist, the amount of Barnardo Children immigrating to Canada did not peak until Baranrdo's death in 1905. Following the loss of its founder, the Barnardo Children program steadily dropped in numbers before coming to a halt upon the start of World War I. Barnardo's legacy was a controversial one: in 1900, de Brissac Owen was accused of sexually exploiting the Barnardo girls in his care and failing to protect the girls from predatory men.<sup>33</sup> In 1913, the Barnardo Council again faced backlash on accusations of the children being 'too young' for emigration. There were also fears the children's new homes were not properly screened and their new families would overwork them.

In spite of the controversies surrounding Barnardo, one cannot deny his impact on British child emigration. Over the course of thirty-three years, the Barnardo program sent about 25,000 British children to Canada, more than any other child emigration agency. Until 1907, the Barnardo Children sent to Canada made up between fourteen and nineteen percent of all children in Barnardo children's homes.

### **South Africa**

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<sup>32</sup> Parker, *Uprooted*, 72.

<sup>33</sup> Parker, *Uprooted*, 73.

The migration of Home Children to the Cape of Good Hope is just one event in the long history of British colonization in South Africa. The majority of the children sent to the Cape were ‘street Arabs’—children who wandered the streets dressed in rags—and children who had run afoul with the law. Most were sent to South Africa via the Children’s Friend Society, and it is this migration scheme in particular that exposed many of the true horrors of this organization.

In 1795, the Dutch-controlled Cape of Good Hope (also known as the Cape Colony) on the coast of South Africa fell to the British Crown. The Dutch would recover dominion over the Cape in 1803, only to lose it to British authority again in 1806; soon after, they officially ceded rule to Britain, and Britain secured their victory with the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1814.<sup>34</sup> Britain wasted no time in colonizing her new territory: a group of British migrants settled in the Cape of Good Hope and the Eastern Cape of South Africa in 1820, under governmental orders. The Napoleonic Wars caused a major surge of unemployment in Britain, and many of these settlers were members of the working-class struggling to make ends meet. It is perhaps unsurprising that, over the course of the next hundred years, poor British children would comprise most of these migrant groups, sent to the Cape through organizations allegedly championing children’s well-being and safety. One such organization was the Children’s Friend Society.

The Children’s Friend Society was first introduced to the Cape of Good Hope as a viable option for child migration by John Philip, a British missionary and friend of Vice-Admiral Jaheel Brenton. His reasoning was the convenience of the Cape’s location: it was a station on the route

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<sup>34</sup> W. H. Robson, “New Light on Lord Castlereagh’s Diplomacy,” *The Journal of Modern History* 2, no. 3 (1931): 198.

to India, thus making it a matter of imperial significance.<sup>35</sup> Children were also viewed as the preferable option for laborers on account of resentment felt by free European laborers doing “slave’s work” following the abolition of slavery in 1834. In fact, organizers of the 1820 settlers struggled to recruit adults for migration, as adults were considered ill-tempered and too acclimated to European conditions to thrive in South Africa.<sup>36</sup> Children were also believed to be less prone to pushing back against low wages, instead remaining content with learning farm techniques from local farmers in return for lodging and clothing.

Many of these child migrants faced abuse and neglect upon their arrival to the Cape of Good Hope. Even prior to their arrival, it appeared fate was not on their side: Charles Buller, a British politician and reformer, referred to these child migrants as being ‘shoveled’ out of England.<sup>37</sup> Most of them were the children of alcoholic parents, factory workers, or juvenile offenders of the law.<sup>38</sup>

### **Australia and New Zealand**

Two more popular destinations for Home Children were the colonies of Australia and New Zealand. As was the case with the other countries receiving Home Children, white

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<sup>35</sup> Edna Bradlow, “The Children’s Friend Society at the Cape of Good Hope,” *Victorian Studies* 27 no. 2 (1984): 157.

<sup>36</sup> Edna Bradlow, “The Children’s Friend Society at the Cape of Good Hope,” *Victorian Studies* 27 no. 2 (1984): 157.

<sup>37</sup> Edna Bradlow, “The Children’s Friend Society at the Cape of Good Hope,” *Victorian Studies* 27 no. 2 (1984): 158.

<sup>38</sup> Edward Pelham Brenton, *The Bible and Spade; or, Captain Brenton’s Account of the Children’s Friend Society* (1837; repr., Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), 20.

migration agents and politicians in Australia and New Zealand eagerly accepted these children into their country, as it meant filling the colonies with “good British stock.”<sup>39</sup> Most child migrants to Australia were sent to religious institutions or farm training schools, where they endured long work hours and severe discipline. These children would later be referred to as the Lost Children of the Empire.

The first child migrants to Australia were sent by the Children’s Friend Society between 1834 and 1842. This party consisted of 54 boys and 17 girls, the majority of which still had one living parent in England.<sup>40</sup> As a whole, the community was extremely welcoming to these young migrants: a committee to look after the children’s welfare was established, and colonists were encouraged to treat the children as their own. The majority of these migrants ended up working as servants and farm hands to the locals, in spite of the emphasis on the importance of apprenticeships and trade schools.

From the efforts of the Children’s Friend Society came other organizations eager to send young migrants to Australia. In the Parkhurst scheme, juvenile offenders from Parkhurst Prison in the Isle of Wight received polarizing treatment: in Perth, they took up apprenticeships and were generally treated well by other settlers, while they were derogatorily known as ‘child convicts’ elsewhere.<sup>41</sup> One chilling incident was the case of William Beale, an eight-year old boy sentenced to seven years of labor at Lewes Assizes. The Parkhurst scheme ended in 1853, having sent over 1,100 boys to Australia and approximately ninety children to New Zealand. Another

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<sup>39</sup> *The British Empires Series, Volume 3* (Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1900), 28.

<sup>40</sup> Alan Gill, *Orphans of the Empire: The Shocking Story of Child Migration to Australia* (North Sydney: Random House Australia, 1998), 39.

<sup>41</sup> Alan Gill, *Orphans of the Empire: The Shocking Story of Child Migration to Australia* (North Sydney: Random House Australia, 1998), 42.

incident involving a juvenile felon is the case of John Gavin, a fifteen-year old boy sentenced to death for the murder of his employer's son. He became the first white person hanged in the colony of Australia. Gavin's status as a 'child convict' is not unique: Dr. Brian Gandevia, an expert on the subject, believes twenty percent of all convicts sent to Australia were youths convicted of a crime or crimes in a British court. Some sources suggest the percentage was even higher.

The late 1840s to the early 1850s saw a spike in young Irish girls immigrating to Australia, a result of the shortage of young, unmarried women in New South Wales and the horrific living conditions in Ireland following the Potato Famine of 1845. 2500 girls (most around the age of fifteen) were selected for migration to Australia. However, they received far less of a warm welcome than their male counterparts. The lukewarm reception may have been a response to a ship from England that had arrived prior to a ship carrying other British migrants. There were reports of drunkenness among the passengers; some even claimed girls had engaged in sexual relations with the officers of the ship.

The *Earl Grey*, another British ship that brought 56 Irish girls to Australia, also had a notorious reputation among colonists in Sydney. The girls, accused of having poor temperaments, stealing, and using profane language, were ruled as 'undesirable' by the local committee formed to look after the welfare of child migrants. Following this incident, the Irish Poor Law Commissioners were advised to be more 'selective' with whom they chose to send overseas.<sup>42</sup> After five years, the migration scheme lost momentum, having sent over 4,000 girls to Australia, where they became the domestic servants, wives and mother of British settlers.

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<sup>42</sup> Gill, *Orphans of the Empire*, 45.

The twentieth century, particularly during World War II, thrust the matter of child migration to New Zealand into the public eye. New Zealand and Australia had been accepting child refugees from Britain since the early 1940s, through the combined efforts of the New Zealand government and Britain's Children's Overseas Reception Board.<sup>43</sup> One important difference between New Zealand's acceptance of child migrants versus Australia's was *where* the children went upon their arrival. In Australia, many were sent to religious institutions, orphanages, or local farms; in New Zealand, most children were placed with a foster family. This arrangement was generally made before the child had even left Britain, and many foster parents were related to the child or a close friend of the parents or guardian. However, not even familial ties were enough to protect children from abuse, overwork and neglect at the hands of their foster families.

### Canada

Thousands of Home Children emigrating from England ended up on farms in the Canadian countryside. Many proponents and supporters of the program painted an over-idealized vision of Canada: Thomas Barnardo proclaimed it a "fair, garden-like country, yielding abundantly," while Annie MacPherson referred to emigration to Canada as "spring transplanting." For some children, particularly younger ones, their arrival in Canada was the beginning of a truly better life. For others, Canada marked the death of their childhoods. Those studying the history of the Home Children will find Canada a treasure trove of information; of all

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<sup>43</sup> Alan Gill, *Orphans of the Empire: The Shocking History of Child Migration to Australia* (North Sydney: Random House Australia, 1998), 436.

the children's destinations, the lives of Home Children in Canada are the most famous and well-documented.

### **Documentation of Home Children Emigration**

Emigration to Canada was not a phenomenon exclusive to the Home Children: many British emigrants favored Canada as their choice of destination as it was a British colony and it was fairly close in proximity to the metropole of Britain.<sup>44</sup> The wide open spaces of Canada were also a powerful draw for those seeking to improve the lives of young British emigrants. Ideally, the children would be removed from an environment detrimental to their health and social development and sent to rural, clean areas in which to grow up. They would receive a proper education while repaying their foster families for their generosity by performing labor and domestic services around the household and farm.

Canada was also a popular destination for Home Children as it was in great need of laborers.<sup>45</sup> In 1851, a letter addressed to R.T. Pennefather, the Lieutenant Governor, informed him that laborers were in high demand in Canada, with hopeful employers promising high wages. Female servants were especially desired, and many Canadian farmers sought the labor of emigrant children fourteen and older, although they were willing to take in healthy children younger than fourteen.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Binnie Dunloi, "Child Emigration," *The British Medical Journal* 1 no. 2573 (London: BMJ Publishing Group Ltd., 1910): 1023.

<sup>45</sup> Goldwin Smith, "Emigration to Canada," *Charity Organisation Review* 6 no. 3 (Oxford University Press, 1890): 112.

<sup>46</sup> Marjorie Kohli, *The Golden Bridge: Young Immigrants to Canada, 1833-1939* (Toronto, Canada: Natural Heritage, 2003), 14.

Initially well-received, the Home Children movement gained detractors the longer it dragged on. Canadians in particular grew critical of the emigration scheme over fears it was ruining the social and moral ‘purity’ of the country.<sup>47</sup> Not even the children’s ‘benefactors’ came to the children’s defense: they claimed to see ‘dangerous’ traits in their young wards, and anti-immigration campaigns surged in Canada in the latter half of the nineteenth century well into the beginning of the twentieth century.

### **Indentured Servitude vs. Adoption**

The employment of children as workers and laborers is one of the most famous aspects of the Home Children program. Controversial even in its heyday, many young emigrants found themselves indentured to their foster families, for whom they were to work until they reached the age of eighteen. Not all children, however, met this particular fate. Younger emigrants, typically four years old and under, were often adopted by their foster families and treated as such; it was children five and older that were at the highest risk for abuse upon their arrival in Canada. Many of these adoptions were also not legal in the modern sense of the word: for many Canadian families, ‘adopting’ a Home Child was simply welcoming them into their family and treating them as such. While these young emigrants enjoyed the privileges of family life more so than their older counterparts, there was a *very* important fact omitted in the adoption process: many of the children said to be orphans were not actually orphans in the modern sense of the word.

### **Were Home Children Truly Orphans?**

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<sup>47</sup> Patricia T. Rooke and R.L. Schnell, “Imperial Philanthropy and Colonial Response: British Juvenile Immigration to Canada, 1896-1930,” *The Historian* 46, no. 1 (1983): 58.

For many Canadian farmers, one of the most compelling reasons to adopt a young British emigrant were claims from Home Children supporters that the children were orphans, doomed to fend for themselves in a strange, unfamiliar land. Many families jumped at the chance to take advantage of what was not only an act of ‘saving’ helpless children, but a decision that would prove useful to farmers in the long run: the child would be an excellent source of labor around the home and farm. However, only around ten percent of these ‘orphans’ were, in fact, orphans.<sup>48</sup> Andrew Doyle, an English philanthropist and outspoken critic of the Home Children program, reported that many organizations were very lax in acquiring consent from parents and guardians.<sup>49</sup> Doyle even claims he dealt with several cases in which a Home Child had *both* parents living at the time of their emigration.<sup>50</sup>

Thomas Barnardo was particularly well-known for ignoring or outright failing to obtain consent from parents to send their children overseas. One incident involving a boy known only as ‘Gossage’ recounts how the child was given by his mother to an organ grinder upon the death of his father. He was later transferred to a Barnardo home, and plans were arranged for him to be sent to Canada. Gossage’s mother, however, wrote to Barnardo and asked for the boy to be sent to a Catholic home, a request which Barnardo proceeded to ignore.<sup>51</sup> Gossage’s mother was naturally displeased with this reaction: Barnardo was even ordered by the court to return Gossage, to no avail.

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<sup>48</sup> Lori Oschefski. Interview by CBC Manitoba. Personal Interview. July 31, 2016.

<sup>49</sup> John Eekelaar, “‘The Chief Glory’: The Export of Children from the United Kingdom,” *Journal of Law and Society* 21 no. 4 (John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1994): 6.

<sup>50</sup> John Eekelaar, “‘The Chief Glory’: The Export of Children from the United Kingdom,” *Journal of Law and Society* 21 no. 4 (John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1994): 7.

<sup>51</sup> John Eekelaar, “‘The Chief Glory,’” *Journal of Law and Society* 21, no. 4 (1994): 7.

A possible motive for false claims about the children's status as 'orphans' may be traced back to the children's home lives. One of the main goals of the movement was removing children from dangerous living conditions; if the parents were believed to be contributing to such conditions—whether or not this was actually the case—and thus deemed unfit to care for their child (or children), it is not hard to see why there would be such hesitation on the part of the supporters to seek out parental consent prior to sending the children overseas.<sup>52</sup> Among directors of children's homes, there were fears 'reformed' street children would revert back to their 'old ways' of criminality if returned to their home environments. The desire to shuffle the children out of the country as quickly as possible—and by any means necessary—was the extreme result of such concerns.

### Case Study

Lori Oschefski is a Canadian author and CEO of the British Home Children Advocacy and Research Association (BHCARA). She founded the BHCARA in 2012, hoping to bring attention to the history of the Home Children in Canada. Oschefski interviewed one of these Home Children, Walter Goulding, about his childhood and experiences growing up as a Home Child in Canada.

Goulding begins his story with his home life in England. His father left him, his mother and six siblings after enlisting in the British army during World War I. Goulding's mother and younger brother died of an illness—Goulding does not know which one—when he was six. He was sent to a Barnardo home soon after his mother's death. As an adult, Goulding was only

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<sup>52</sup> Patricia T. Rooke and R.L. Schnell, "Imperial Philanthropy and Colonial Response: British Juvenile Immigration to Canada, 1896-1930," *The Historian* 46, no. 1 (1983): 61.

reunited with one of his five remaining siblings; a younger sister, never knowing what became of the rest of his family. During his time in the children's home, Goulding was asked if he was 'willing to leave your [Goulding's] own country, and go to another country.'<sup>53</sup> He explained he was willing to leave England under one condition: he asked to be given two destinations as options. He was told to choose between Canada or Australia. Goulding ultimately settled on Canada as he felt a trip from England to Australia would be far too long and monotonous.

Upon his arrival, Goulding was sent to a farmer in a little village between Stratford and Mitchell. The change in environment was a great shock to Goulding; it took him some time to adjust to the rural spaces of the Canadian countryside. Unlike many Home Children, Goulding was fortunate with his foster family; he looks back on his time with the farmer, Bert Blacklock, and his wife with fondness: "That was one thing God did give me: a good start [to his new life in Canada]."<sup>54</sup> The couple were in their mid-thirties, newly married and had recently lost a child. Goulding suspects this may have played a role in the love and affection they showed him. Goulding remained with this family for about nine and a half years. Eventually, he says, Canada became his home, in every sense of the word. Goulding died in August of 2014, at the age of 106.

### **Experience of Immigrant Children**

The experiences of Home Children varied greatly across the board, although one common factor of all the children was the sense of isolation and confusion that came with being an immigrant in an unfamiliar country. For many children, this sense of isolation and exclusion

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<sup>53</sup> Walter Goulding. Interview by Lori Oschefski. Personal Interview. December 2, 2012.

<sup>54</sup> Walter Goulding. Interview by Lori Oschefski. Personal Interview. December 2, 2012.

manifested in very real, damaging ways. The vast majority of Home Children—especially those in Canada—faced stigma for their status as immigrants and members of the working-class; such ostracization resulted in feelings of shame that many children carried with them for the rest of their lives.

### **Treatment**

The children's ill treatment began even before they left England. One of the greatest critiques of the Home Children movement was Andrew Doyle, English philanthropist and "local government inspector." In many of his reports back to England, Doyle describes the abuses the children suffered and the complicity of Home Children proponents to not only ignore such incidents, but to downplay them or cover them up altogether.

After their arrival, they were placed temporarily in 'Homes' while they waited to be 'distributed' to a family. The poor conditions of the home were notorious, and many Home Children dreaded being returned to these Homes should their foster families find them 'inadequate'. Of the food, one girl at Home run by Maria Rye, reported that "... the bread was mouldy, and what was called meat was unfit to eat."<sup>55</sup> Another girl claimed that upon her return for a 'violent temper', she was locked in solitary confinement for eleven days, with only bread and water to sustain her.<sup>56</sup> Doyle questioned why there were no current regulations in place to prevent such abuse happening if the stories were true; if they were not, he said, then the visit of a

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<sup>55</sup> Andrew Doyle, "Return to an order of the Honorable the House of the Commons," (1875), 18.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Doyle, "Return to an order of the Honorable the House of the Commons," (1875), 18.

committee for children's safety would be in Rye's best interests to prevent such stories from getting out.

Doyle also writes that many of the children's foster families were not properly screened prior to the child being placed in their care. MacPherson reportedly put her trust in agencies that were ill-equipped to obtain such pertinent information, and Rye "trusts to the accident" of finding people in Canadian districts to not only find good homes for the children, but to essentially take them off her hands.<sup>57</sup> Both Rye and MacPherson showed a desire to be rid of the children as soon as possible; if they had not been so eager to have the children carted off to new homes, they would have been able to dedicate more time and care in selecting the families they chose for the young emigrants in the first place. Even after the children had been placed with foster families, employees of the children's homes did not inquire about them, or bother to check up on them.

Many girls were outspoken about their treatment and experiences with their foster families. Many girls around the ages of twelve to fourteen were particularly dissatisfied with their status as domestic servants, and expressed an excitement to "become their own mistresses." Doyle writes he was even cautioned against informing these girls of their independence upon coming of age, as they had a tendency to leave their foster families and seek employment elsewhere the first chance they got.

One case of child abuse concerned a boy known as 'G. McM.', employed in the services of 'Mr. M' of Port Hope. Doyle managed to track down 'G. McM's' sister, 'Annie McM', who informed him of a very troubling letter she received from her brother. In his letter, her brother

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<sup>57</sup> Andrew Doyle, "Return to an order of the Honorable the House of the Commons," (1875), 20.

told her his employer “used him very badly”, a statement that so distressed Annie that she asked ‘Mrs. G’, a caregiver at a children’s Home, to send her son to fetch the boy and remove him from his abusive employer.<sup>58</sup> He was successfully taken to a home in St. Catharine’s, where he was given to another employer, ‘Mr. R’. ‘Mr. R’ left for America in search of work; failed to do so; and upon his return to St. Catharine’s, willingly abandoned ‘G. McM’ twice. At his second abandonment, ‘G’ was found sitting on a box at the corner of the street, crying. It was here he came into the protection of ‘Mrs. G’, who sent him to work with a market gardener; thankfully, this gardener proved a much kinder benefactor than ‘Mr. R’.<sup>59</sup>

### Education

For some Home Children, education was a rare privilege, not a fundamental right. In the eyes of many foster families, Home Children were merely a helpful set of hands around the farm and household, a means of fulfilling chores while their own children receive an education in school. Other families were obligated to send the Home Children to school to receive a basic education, but many only relented as long as the children were not needed in the fields.<sup>60</sup> In the districts around the Muskoka Lakes of Ontario, fear and distrust of Home Children went to such extremes, there were attempts to ban the children from schools altogether. Near Bracebridge, a board of trustees was created for the sole purpose of preventing the children from even setting

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<sup>58</sup> Andrew Doyle, “Return to an order of the Honorable the House of the Commons,” (1875), 26.

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Doyle, “Return to an order of the Honorable the House of the Commons,” (1875), 27.

<sup>60</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2001), 74.

foot in the schools; the argument was because the children did not have parents paying taxes, they were not entitled to an education the way the children of citizens were.<sup>61</sup>

### **Resulting Shame and Stigma**

One of the chief concerns of Canadians regarding the Home Children was their background: many came from poor, broken homes, and therefore posed a threat to the ‘purity’ of Canadian society. Some children were also considered inferior on account of physical weaknesses, a form of classism and rather eugenic thinking that resulted in such discriminatory attitudes towards the Home Children.<sup>62</sup> What is perhaps even more heartbreaking about such stigma faced by the children is the encouragement Annie MacPherson offered them, encouragement to be “patient, brave, and good” in the face of adversity.<sup>63</sup> Many Home Children internalized this stigma and shame, and most did not speak of their childhoods as indentured servants in later years. Some did not reveal their histories to their families until they were elderly; other families only found out after their Home Child relative(s) had died, upon doing their own research into their loved one’s past.

### **Lengthy Timeframe of the Home Children Movement**

The time frame of the Home Children movement varied from country to country. In Canada, the program is generally accepted as lasting from 1869 until 1948. In South Africa,

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<sup>61</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2001), 74.

<sup>62</sup> Sharon R. Roseman, *Migration by Boat: Discourses of Trauma, Exclusion, and Survival* (Berghaahn Books, 2016), 30.

<sup>63</sup> Sharon R. Roseman, *Migration by Boat: Discourses of Trauma, Exclusion, and Survival* (Berghaahn Books, 2016), 30.

Australia, and New Zealand, children were sent overseas up until the 1970s. Children were still being received into Canada even through World War I. It was not until the beginning of World War II that the Home Children movement came to a crawl, at least for those bound for Canada.

In 1910, a parish in Manchester became the first local British initiative to curb child migration. Olga Hertz, chairman of the Cottage Homes Committee, was disturbed by the lack of educational opportunities available for child migrants, and believed the quality of Canadian workhouses would improve if a woman was added to the staff of the Immigration Branch.<sup>64</sup> This being said, Hertz was still a firm supporter of child migration: she reported being “more than ever convinced that by sending children to Canada we are giving them happier and healthier surroundings than we can provide for them at home.”<sup>65</sup>

During the 1920s, efforts were made to prevent children under the age of fourteen from immigrating without their parents. It was not until 1924 that children under fourteen years of age were officially discouraged from immigration to Canada, on account of an increase in social consciousness of children’s rights (or the lack thereof). Regardless of this push for an end to the migration of young children, many still managed to slip through the cracks; it was not until the end of World War II that condemnation of sending Home Children to Canada gained nationwide traction throughout Britain. There were also arguments that child migration “distracted from the real problem at home,” and British society needed to reorganize completely in order to address inequitable distributions of wealth.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1980), 146.

<sup>65</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1980), 146.

<sup>66</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1980), 152.

The rise of the Labour Party in the 1920s also played a role in the downfall of child migration. The movement of taking other people's children and sending them overseas to a family that may or may not treat them with respect was being called into question.<sup>67</sup> The situation became so dire that a meeting was held in late February of 1924 at the British House of Commons to discuss what was to be done about child immigration to Canada. In response to these concerns, a delegation was "appointed to investigate the Canadian child emigration system."<sup>68</sup> The delegation found the programme acceptable, but suggested that the children should not immigrate before they were of working (that is, school-leaving) age.

In March of 1925, the Dominion Immigration Branch officially declared no child under the age of fourteen would be permitted to immigrate to Canada for the next three years if they were unaccompanied by a parent. In 1928, the ban was made permanent; while there were some exceptions, for the most part, British child emigration had finally come to an end.

### **Idealized Program vs. Reality**

The Home Children movement was touted as a means of 'rescuing' poor children from a life of poverty and suffering in England and sending them to wide open spaces in the British colonies. In the eyes of Annie MacPherson, Louisa Birt, and Maria Rye, they were doing the Lord's work, saving poor waifs, strays, and "street Arabs" from themselves and turning them into 'respectable' workers and laborers. However, for many children, the promise of freedom and a 'better life' was a bitter lie, and the only things that awaited them at their new homes was neglect

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<sup>67</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 152.

<sup>68</sup> Joy Parr, *Labouring Children* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 153.

and abuse. Among the most discomfiting aspects of the movement are the blatant falsifications and ignorance—whether willful or not—of the proponents and supporters to actually see some of the damage they were wrecking upon the lives of the children they claimed to be saving.

As a Quaker, Annie MacPherson felt compelled to rescue poor children from ‘dangerous’ living situations as part of her duty as a devout Christian woman. It is this religious devotion that fueled her fire for the Home Children program, and it is likely this same devotion that blinded her to the reality of many children sent to Canada via her program: as a good Victorian, Christian woman, MacPherson would have believed all of her actions to be righteous, as they were all done in God’s name, even if reality suggested otherwise. One example of idealism straying remarkably far from reality was the state in which some children arrived in Canada: although Macpherson encouraged cleanliness among the youth, she failed to provide them any soap or even bedding on their voyage.<sup>69</sup> Charges of “vermin-infested” children would be a blight on MacPherson’s child emigration efforts for years to come.

The business of child migration seemed to have run in the family. Annie’s younger sister, Louisa Birt, became involved in British child migration schemes in 1870 while recovering from an illness at her sister’s home. She too was moved by the plight of poor youth of England, and in 1873, Birt opened a home for poverty-stricken children in Liverpool. She described these children as, “... widows’ children left to their own devices... poor stepchildren, who are felt to be burdens... drunkards’ children... [and] illegitimate children, on whom the sins of their parents are weighing with crushing power.”<sup>70</sup> What follows is a predictable formula: Birt believed all of

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<sup>69</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Dundurn Press, 2001), 27-28.

<sup>70</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Dundurn Press, 2001), 30.

these ‘streets arabs’ and ‘waifs’ would be better off overseas, where they would be placed with farmers in the province of Nova Scotia. Some of these children would be ‘returned’ or ‘removed’, and while the register listing the children’s names and homes in which they were placed does not elaborate further, it can be assumed—based on the experiences of these children—that they were rejected for being too lazy, small or shy to be of any ‘real’ assistance.

Once again, Andrew Doyle must be referenced when discussing the reality of the Home Children movement. In the spring of 1874, Doyle was elected by the Poor Law Board to travel to Canada and see how the child migrants were faring with their new families and how they were being treated in MacPherson’s children’s homes. Nearly a month after his departure from England, Doyle arrived at a small port in Montreal. He then made his way across Canada, stopping at the distributing homes of MacPherson and Rye; during his visits to these homes, he met both women in person.<sup>71</sup> As an inspector, Doyle did his best to come across as cordial and courteous as possible, although he was generally a very likable man by nature. Doyle interrogated MacPherson and Rye on the conditions of the homes—how many children could one room hold? how was food chosen and prepared? and what were the children’s sleeping arrangements? Doyle also questioned the women on how they were able to ensure children were not ‘passed around’ from farmer to farmer and how carefully they kept track of the whereabouts of the children they had placed with foster families.

In his report, Doyle declared that MacPherson and Rye were “‘inspired by the highest motives” and much of their accomplishments were indeed positive.<sup>72</sup> He even went so far as to

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<sup>71</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Dundurn Press, 2001), 39.

<sup>72</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Dundurn Press, 2001), 40.

warn others who might criticize the women's migration efforts on the negative experiences alone of some children, especially those who were plucked off the streets and placed with Canadian farming families. However, there was a strategy to these praises: Doyle knew including them in his report would make it more balanced and therefore more "legitimate." He insisted no claim would be made in his report that he could not support with solid evidence. Ultimately, Doyle's report was a condemnation of the entire movement of child migration, from the means by which the children were taken to organizations in England, to the methods of sending them overseas to Canada.<sup>73</sup> Doyle recognized that MacPherson, Rye, and many other rescue workers were driven by religious compassion, but believed them to be naive to the 'true nature' of the so-called street arabs, who were considered more 'depraved' than their workhouse counterparts. It was Doyle's belief these 'street arabs' did more harm than good to Canadian society, and worried that the lack of distinction between 'depraved' street arabs and 'destitute' workhouse children essentially discredited the entire group.

The most damning aspect of Doyle's report, however, was his account of the supervision of the children once they had been 'turned over' to Canadian farmers. Rye did not even bother supervising the children at all; they were simply 'handed out' across Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and operated under the assumption that no news from the foster families was good news.<sup>74</sup> Many girls given to farmers through Rye's program were never heard from again. Doyle would go to the children's foster homes in hopes of finding these girls, only to discover they were nowhere to be found. Of MacPherson's supervision, Doyle was less appalled, but

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<sup>73</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Dundurn Press, 2001), 41.

<sup>74</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Dundurn Press, 2001), 43.

disapproving nonetheless. During his investigation, MacPherson had taken in so many children into her home, she and her volunteers were ill-equipped to keep up with all of the children at once. Doyle also found the visits undertaken by MacPherson's workers highly lacking: "The visits do not constitute the sort of inspection that is of much use, but a good deal more the character of visits from friends and guests of the employers."<sup>75</sup> Such careless supervision resulted in not only missing children, but abuse cases gone unchecked, which were confirmed not only by the victims, but their masters as well. Because of MacPherson's lack of resources and Rye's own carelessness, child migrants were being thrown to the wolves left and right, never to be seen again or forced to suffer abuse by the people they had been promised would protect them. Child emigration, Doyle declared, could not be allowed to continue.

## **Conclusion**

### **The Young English Child Immigrant Experience**

Although the Home Children movement was borne of good intentions, it ultimately did more harm than good. Thousands of children were left to suffer with abusive, neglectful foster families that exploited them for labor. While some had happier experiences, many Home Children were left to endure their hardship and trauma alone, refusing to acknowledge or even speak of their past until many, many years later. Things were not all bleak, however: thanks to Andrew Doyle's efforts, the failings of the Home Children movement and its supporters were brought to light. Following a long, intensive hearing in the winter of 1875, workhouses stopped

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<sup>75</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Dundurn Press, 2001), 44.

supporting Rye, and she was forbidden from sending any children to Canada for the next three years. The London *Times* declared child immigration to Canada was to be put on hold until proper reforms were made.<sup>76</sup>

However, these compromises were just that, compromises, and later that year, a Canadian inspection would declare child immigration a ‘shining value’ to both the country and the child migrants themselves. Not even an article relating the pregnancy of a preteen girl in Rye’s facilities was enough to dissuade her supporters: “One of Miss Rye’s girls, herself a mere child appearing about 12 or 13—has been delivered of an infant. The poor girl is living with a family which claims to be quite respectable, and therefore no blame can possibly attach to Miss Rye.”<sup>77</sup> The lengths which the author of this article was willing to go in defense of Rye is nothing short of remarkable; a letter from one of her most ardent supporters followed suit several days later. This man, R. N. Ball of Niagara-on-the-Lake, used this incident as a means of criticism against Doyle: “I wish Mr. Doyle could see what a storm of indignation this St. Catharines case has produced; he would be obliged to acknowledge that public opinion is a power in Canada.”<sup>78</sup>

The belief that Home Children ought to be grateful to Canadian farmers for taking them in (and therefore had no right to ‘complain’ of ill treatment) was another obstacle Doyle was going up against. Given their lower class status, these children were thought of as ‘lesser breeds’, and almost any change from their ‘dreary’ lives in England would surely be an improvement.<sup>79</sup>

One final incident regarding the experiences of the Home Children concerns a young girl named

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<sup>76</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Dundurn Press, 2000), 53.

<sup>77</sup> Kenneth Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants: The Orphans Who Came to Canada* (Dundurn Press, 2001), 51.

<sup>78</sup> Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants*, 51.

<sup>79</sup> Bagnell, *The Little Immigrants*, 52.

Mary Ford, who was, according to friends and acquaintances back in England, a girl of good character and great promise. Ford was sent to Canada through one of Rye's programs, and Ford was passed from family to family, never knowing a 'real' home in Canada, until she disappeared from records altogether. Rye looked back on her as an 'obstinate, impertinent, ill-conditioned' girl who never ought to have gone to Canada in the first place.

### **Patterns of Immigration in History**

Although the Home Children provided foster families—and Canadian settler society as a whole—with labor and domestic service, they were considered nuisances, a threat to the morality and 'purity' of the country. From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, there were concerns over the 'temperament' of the child migrants, and many were called 'depraved' for no reason other than because they were poor, working-class, and *sometimes* involved in thievery and beggary prior to their immigration. They were feared and ostracized because of what they *might* do on account of their social status and background.

In twenty-first century America, immigrants from Latin America provide the country with necessary labor—they are migrant workers, maids, and janitors, to name a few—yet their work is often dismissed as 'unskilled' labor. There are fears they are 'stealing' jobs from 'real' Americans and disrupting the "American way of life." Latinx immigrants have been called rapists and drug dealers, feared and ostracized for what they *might* do on account of their race and countries of origin.

This pattern of belittling and discriminating against immigrants is not new. While it is not fair to draw a direct correlation between the Home Children of the Victorian era and Latinx

immigrants today due to one group being racially white while the other is not, there are certainly parallels to be made. In both cases, American and Canadian citizens worried over the ‘purity’ of their countries with the acceptance of immigrants. The labor performed by these immigrants was downplayed or outright dismissed and belittled in spite of the pivotal role they played in keeping the countries’ economies and society thriving. They were discriminated against and made to feel shame and stigma for their status as immigrants, and treated as lesser because of it. Chinese, Italian and Irish immigrants to America in the early twentieth century also faced xenophobia—and racism in the case of Chinese immigrants—and discrimination, even though many worked as manual laborers during the construction of railroads and in the fields.

The Home Children movement is just one of the countless examples of mistreatment, discrimination, and hatred of immigrants throughout history. Anti-immigrant sentiment is a manifestation of a very human fear of anything that is perceived as ‘different’ or exists outside the status quo. It speaks to the desire to categorize and classify people into neat little boxes of ‘Us’ vs. ‘Them’, and anything that tries to ‘steal’ a spot within the ‘Us’ box is to be met with suspicion, distrust and scorn. Try as they might to assimilate as best they can in order to become one of ‘Us’, those who consider themselves the ‘true’ members of the in-group will never really see these people as one of ‘Them’. The discrimination against Home Children is the result of gatekeeping, xenophobia, purity culture, and child exploitation all in one, a testament to the fear of the Outsider, the Invader, the Other. The Home Children are just one example of what can happen when human rights violations are acceptable so long as the victims are ‘acceptable’ targets.

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*An image of the author's great-grandfather, Arthur Christian, a British Home Child. Photo courtesy of John and Connie Christian*