

PEOPLING THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH¹

PEOPLING THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH is the most recent of a series of books to come from the versatile pen of Dr. G. F. McCleary. By training, a medical doctor, the author has exhibited a multiplicity of interests and talents. Until his retirement from active work his chief interests were in the broad social aspects of medicine and public health. He wrote on the British maternity and child welfare movement, on infant mortality, and on national health insurance.

Since his retirement from the field of public health his interest has turned to population. The resulting books have included *THE MENACE OF BRITISH DEPOPULATION* (1937), *POPULATION: TODAY'S QUESTION* (1938), *RACE SUICIDE?* (1945), and *THE MALTHUSIAN POPULATION THEORY* (1953). As may be judged from the 1937 and 1938 titles, the author's interest in population began at a time when the birth rates throughout the civilized world were practically at their lowest levels.

In *PEOPLING THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH*, as in his previous books on population, the author conceives his main task to be that of taking the story to the public. He is characteristically modest in his claims regarding technical qualifications as a demographer and as an economist.

This reviewer has always found Dr. McCleary's style of writing and exposition delightful. He digs out for the reader interesting side lights of historical character and illustrates his points by frequent pickings from the classics. Thus, " 'My pork pies', said Priscilla Lammeter in *SILAS MARNER*, 'don't turn out well by chance.' " Dr. McCleary makes no effort to conceal his own stand on demographic problems. As already indicated, the title of a book may reveal his stand. Despite this, he also gives the impression of wanting to present both sides or all sides of a given question.

In the book under review the author first gives a treatment of the rise of the British Commonwealth. He then discusses the components of population growth, birth rates, death rates, and migration in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New

¹ McCleary, G. F.: *PEOPLING THE BRITISH COMMONWEALTH*. London, Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1955, xv + 174 pp., 18 shillings.

Zealand, and South Africa. With reference to each country the demographic story is told in the context of economic development. The final three chapters are on redistribution of the population, dispersal by mass migration, and the outlook.

In brief, the story that is told is one of considerable migration of British people from the Mother Country to the others mentioned above during the Nineteenth Century. Then, largely because of declines in the birth rate in the United Kingdom, the Mother Country virtually ceased furnishing people to the other countries. In fact, for several years during the economic depression, the net flow was toward England. The author attributes this partly to the earlier advances of social legislation in England which made the people of that country reluctant to leave.

Since World War II, there has been renewed interest in stimulating migration from the Mother Country to the various countries of the Commonwealth, especially to Australia and Canada. This development within the British family of nations has been prompted mainly by a desire to enhance the general welfare of the entire Commonwealth, and to promote the feeling of interdependence of these people. Thus, although the demographic position of the United Kingdom is still one of "incipient population decline," the density of population in that area is still far above that of the outlying countries. The memory of her narrow escape in World War II has prompted Australia to take an active role in increasing her population. Dr. McCleary gives an account of the various types of bilateral financial assistance for stimulating migration from the United Kingdom to Australia and other countries of the Commonwealth. Dr. McCleary's last sentences in the book, however, issue at once a hope and a warning concerning the demographic future of the British Dominions: "British families have become small because British fathers and mothers wanted small families. If they had wanted larger families they could have had them. These Dominion postwar birth rates may, perhaps, mean that in these wonderful young countries—so richly endowed, so full of the things that make for the joy of life—if not in the Mother Country, fathers and mothers are now wanting more children. We are not without grounds for the hope that it may be so." (p. 169.)

One criticism that may be made against the book is that it is so little concerned with the aboriginal and colored populations of the Dominions. There are, of course, understandable reasons for this. The statistics of the Maoris in New Zealand, the aboriginals of Australia, and the non-Europeans in South Africa are poor. Yet it perhaps also could be said that the poor state of statistics for these people reflects in some degree the past indifference to these people. In this connection, one also notes that the title of the book apparently rules out consideration of British subjects in the relatively underdeveloped areas that never attained Dominion status. Criticisms of this character may be made, but they do not alter the fact that Dr. McCleary has provided a useful and interesting book.

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