**REVIEW**


*Migration and Empire* is the latest in the Oxford History of the British Empire Companion Series. Aimed at pursuing themes, which could not be adequately covered in the main five-volume survey of the Empire, this supplementary volume examines various aspects of migration within the Empire and Commonwealth in the period between 1815 and 1960. Authored by leading Scottish emigration historian Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, an English based historian of British emigration, both have a wealth of experience in this field.

In trying to address the vastness of the topic, the authors adopt a dual approach, first examining several key migrant destinations within the Empire, and then looking at important migration themes pertinent to this period. The imperial territories given their own dedicated chapters are Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Africa, all of which are broken down by themed subsections. Chapter 2 (Crossing the Atlantic: Migrants and Settlers in Canada) for example, is split into sections respectively titled “UK Migrants and Settlement Patterns,” “Sponsors’ Motives,” “The Hopes and Means of Migrants,” “Warnings and Controversies,” and “Identities” followed by a useful conclusion tying together the main points. What emerges from this chapter is a complex picture of individual immigrants being influenced not just by a combination of push and pull factors but the varying policies and practises of promoters, including governments, land speculators, and of course, the all too often castigated landlords. Yet sentimentalists should be ware, while due
attention is given to the latter, Harper and Constantine conclude that “Most [migrants] were characterized by their hope and ambition than by disillusionment and despair” (p. 25).

While understandably much of the attention in this and the other geographically focused chapters concentrate on migration from the UK, the authors do emphasize in the introduction that Migrants and Empire is not exclusively concerned with the movement of white migrants, but also “the often related movement of black African migrant workers into southern Africa, of Pacific Islanders to Australia, and of British Indians to a wide range of other empire spaces” (p. 4). This commitment is met in several chapters, but notably the first thematic chapter is specifically dedicated to non-white migration and settlement. Here the authors point out that while 2,786,650 “natives of the UK” were living elsewhere in the empire in 1901, an additional 1,467,275 “natives of other British countries” were also living outside their country of birth (p. 148). Many were indentured workers, recruited and sent to work overseas as cheap labour on plantations, mines or railway construction projects for an agreed period of time before being able to return home. Much of the discussion focuses on the degradation and humiliation, which characterized the experience of most of those who entered into contracts, and the growing resistance and eventual intolerance to such exploitation. Yet even following the abolition of indenture, non-white migrants faced racial discrimination in the free labour market, something that “clearly contradicted the often trumpeted philosophy of race equality and freedom of movement for all British subjects within the empire” (p. 178).

Other themes to which chapters are dedicated include: migration from the empire into Britain; female migration; child and juvenile migration; the emigration business; and the important but often neglected topic of return migration. As well written and informative as the earlier destination
accounts are, it is these latter chapters, which are the real strength of this book. Although any one could be selected for its quality, because of the contentious nature of child and juvenile migration, chapter 9 is particularly worthy of further mention. Engaging with the debate surrounding the practise, which saw up to 150,000 British children resettled in various parts of the empire (an estimation which the authors consider high), Harper and Constantine argue that on the whole, the motives of those involved in the process were honourable. Most of the children who were sent were from poor backgrounds whose families were unable to look after them, and many fared well in their new homes, some especially so. Furthermore, contrary to the perception that this was a practise to which a blind eye was cast, it is pointed out that juvenile migration was in fact often subject to criticism and as such came under considerable public scrutiny. This is not intended as a defence of the practise but rather an attempt to present a balanced picture, equal consideration being given to the difficulties children faced in adjusting to an unfamiliar environment, often without family, and to the plentiful examples of child migrants who were subject to exploitation and even worse. The price paid by such migrants has only recently been acknowledged, but right or wrong, that the practise lasted so long is evidence of the vision that the British Empire could not just be used for political and economic aims but to advance social welfare strategy as well (p. 276).

Well researched and written, this book matches the expectations associated with an Oxford University Press series. Those specifically interested in Scottish emigration may however question what is in this volume for them. Although the Scots are heavily featured, space does not permit, nor is the intent behind Migration and Empire to focus on the component parts of the UK. What is gained by this reviewer though is a better sense of context. Scottish emigration is often written about in isolation, rather than being seen as part of a wider experience. While setting it in the context of empire
migration may lead to some uncomfortable questions about the uniqueness of the movement of Scots overseas, by doing so we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Scottish diaspora.

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