

“The Land of Milk and Honey”: Migration guidebooks after Leichhardt ?

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“The Land of Milk and Honey” –those were the words with which Wilhelm Kirchner, half ironically, half seriously, summarized his advertising brochure “Australien und seine Vortheile für Auswanderer ” [Australia and its Advantages for Emigrants], taking up the words of an Old Lutheran pastor, who had emigrated to the fifth continent in the ‘Vormärz’ era, that is the decades prior to the failed revolution of 1848. Kirchner had written his booklet in the late summer of 1848, when the European Revolutions were at their peak. Kirchner, who had been born in Frankfurt am Main and emigrated to Sydney in 1839, had returned to the German states in 1848 of all years, . As an ‘immigration agent’ of the government of New South Wales he made every effort to encourage Germans to seek their fortune in this Australian province, which at that time, suffered from an enormous labour shortage of workers, precipitated by the 1841 end of the British convict transports, from which the majority of Australia’s workers had been recruited . Kirchner, who had substantially sponsored Leichhardt’s expedition to Port Essington and was correspondingly honoured by him when naming the “Kirchner Range” in northern Queensland, painted a rosy picture of the future for those readers who were willing to emigrate. While Europe was afflicted by a great famine in 1847, “64 milion pounds of meat were thrown away in Australia”. Likewise, huge amounts of crops were often left to waste away in the fields due to a lack of harvesters. “In Germany there is no work to be found; Australia lacks workers”, wrote Kirchner. Anyway, not only were agricultural workers needed, but also craftsmen of the most diverse professions and even miners for the recently discovered copper and coal mines. Furthermore, the climatic conditions in New South Wales could not have been better; they matched those of southern France. The South-West region of Australia, at that time inhabited by approximately 200.000 people, was such a paradise that “working there involved even less effort than stealing”.

Consequently, “comparatively fewer crimes were committed than in England” and “for more than four years, no execution” had been performed.

Kirchner pretended that he wanted to save his ‘compatriots’ from the destiny of former German migrants, who “perished in unhealthy countries which they migrated to” – and vehemently discouraged his readers from considering alternative destinations for emigration. On top of the exhausting sea passage, emigrants to the U.S.A. had to spend a lot of time and energy to “find employment or to buy land far away in the interior of the country”, if they succeeded at all. In New South Wales, however, the colonist could “have both as soon as he sets foot on the land”. Furthermore, he would enjoy “the same freedom and independence as in America”. In Brazil - with its hot and, for Europeans, unbearable climate – the “thick jungles” could only be cleared “through tremendous work”. In the regions of the future Argentina, which had a rather comfortable moderate climate, on the other hand, “violence and political revolution were the daily fare, so that neither property nor life were safe”. Peru and “Chili” were “often afflicted by heavy earthquakes and the journey to those countries round the Cape Horn was most troublesome”. In the colonies of the Cape of Good Hope, “the good land” was “quite limited” and the settlers were “not safe from attacks and lootings by the savage Kaffirs”. Finally, West and East India were “so unhealthy that they were almost uninhabitable for European workers”.

Kirchner knew that he would not convince many by those arguments alone to start on the dangerous passage to Australia, which required 90 to 120 days; especially since there were no regular passages from Hamburg or Bremen to Australia until the mid-19th century. The crossing was arduous and also expensive. Therefore, Kirchner enticed “brave compatriots” with the promise that “on the way to Australia” the government of New South Wales would provide a generous total credit of 20,000 pounds sterling to underwrite all who decided to emigrate in the year of 1848 or 1849, and who had skills which “could not be found in England”. Especially wine growers and coopers were in demand – occupations that

were often to be found in the agricultural populations of Baden, Württemberg or the Palatinate, which were particularly impoverished due to the ‘gavelkind’ system of land tenure, and who traditionally made up a high percentage of German emigrants. What Kirchner failed to mention in his advertising brochure was that he had specifically agreed in August 1847 with large landowners from the Newcastle and Maitland districts to recruit from those very occupational groups. Kirchner returned to Australia in 1851. After that, he came to be regarded as a successful ‘immigration agent’ and advanced to the position of consul of Hamburg and Prussia in Sydney.

Of course, it was not the keen work of Kirchner or other immigration agents that caused the increasing flow of German-speaking and other European emigrants to overseas destinations. 176,400 people had left the German states in 1852; two years later, it had even grown to 239,200 people – a number which was not reached again until the First World War. In the decade before 1848, however, merely 35,400 Germans departed their home country annually. It was not Australia, but the United States that had been and by far continued to be the chosen destination for German emigrants. Conversely, the vast majority of the 600.000 immigrants who came to Australia between 1851 and 1861 was still from Great Britain and Ireland. Nevertheless, 60.000 continental Europeans set out for Australia in this period, among them a considerable percentage from the German states.

What made them emigrate? Political and economic motives tangled with a simplethirst for adventure. Since the *Ancien Régimes* were consolidated in the late summer of 1849 and all hope for a revolutionary change at home had to be abandoned, the rising wave of emigration in the early 1850s suggests that resignation about the undemocratic conditions in the Old World gained importance in motivating the decision to bid one’s home pastures good-bye. A further “Wegweiser nach Südastralien – oder Südastralien in seiner jetzigen Gestalt” [Guide to South Australia – or South Australia in Its Present Shape], which had been published at the end of August 1849, exactly one year after Kirchner’s booklet is revealing. A

certain J.P.D. Dieseldorff was the author of this guide. Dieseldorff was an agent for the Hamburg shipping and trading company, Joh. Ces. Godeffroy & Son, which established a liner service to Australia in 1850, and he himself had lived in the Australian colonies for a considerable time. Whereas Dieseldorff did not refer in his guidebook to the political circumstances in the Old World as Kirchner had done, he did speculate that the desire to emigrate would only increase after the failure of the revolutions in Germany and Europe. “Our social body [in Germany] is ill”, “pauperism and the prevalent proletariat” were only the most glaring symptoms of the socio-political misery that spread across the European continent. Embarking to Australia offered the best way out for those “tired of Europe”. Therefore, that socio-political was the main reason why the German and European exodus to overseas destinations reached unforeseen dimensions in the second half of the 19th century. If in the ‘Vormärz’ era the name of the game was: “If not emigration, than revolution” (Günter Moltmann), then this motto changed to the contrary after the failure of the revolution of 1848-49: If not revolution, than emigration.

Translated by Asja Harder