

THE MIGRANTS AND CALIFORNIA'S FUTURE

The trek to California, and the trek in California

By

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A new common refrain has appeared in the headlines of our newspapers. We are told that California is menaced by an "influx of indigents," of "paupers," of "jobless." A Los Angeles 'columnist' cries in alarm: "That 5000 indigents are coming into southern California" ... leaves one appalled. This is the gravest problem before the United States ... these tattered migrations." Lamenting our good roads he adds: "The Chinese, wiser than we, have delayed building a great system of highways for that very reason--to head off these dangerous migrations--indigent people stampeding from the farms into cities to live on charity." In June, 1935, an aroused state assembly passed a bill to debar from California "indigents and persons likely to become public charges," but cooler counsel prevailed in the Senate and the bill failed to become law.

Interested, but more aloof, the national magazines have taken up the story under the titles "California, here we come," and "Again the covered wagon." And they even ridicule us Californians, as does Walter Davenport in Collier's, that "All this migration of the unemployed" is "a part of (our) reward for all the milk-and-honey ballyhoo (we) had been broadcasting for years. Come live in southern California for the good of your soul, (we) used to sign ... In California, (we) once told them you live life; elsewhere you merely spend it ... 'Even the tears one sheds in California are tears of gladness.'" So effectively have we "sold" our state that out of every five native white Americans now in California, three are literally "immigrants" to this State. Perhaps we Californians, native and "immigrant," can't complain too much that we are the Mecca of the nation, and that even the distressed have heard our praises and our appeals.

Stand today at the highway portals of California, particularly at the southeastern border. See the shiny cars of tourists, the huge trucks of commerce, the equipment of campers, as they roll by. And at intervals the slow-moving and conspicuous cars loaded with the refugees from drought and depression in other states. They travel in old automobiles and light trucks, some of them home-made, and frequently with trailers behind. All their worldly possessions are piled on the car and covered with old canvas or ragged bedding, with perhaps bedsprings atop, a small iron cook-stove on the running board, a battered trunk, lantern, and galvanized iron washtub tied on behind. Children, aunts, grandmothers and a dog are jammed into the car, stretching its capacity incredibly. A neighbor boy sprawls on top of the loaded trailer.

Most of the refugees are in obvious distress. Clothing is sometimes neat and in good condition, particularly if the emigrants left last fall, came via Arizona, and made a little money in the cotton harvest there.