

The Human Being is a Migratory Animal

There is much in the news these days about immigration – generally about people of the southern climes of our globe migrating into the northern reaches thereof. It has become a hot political issue. In the meantime I wonder why! I mean: if Balaam's ass could see the inevitability of migrations, why can't we? * Human beings have been migrating ever since Adam and Eve were driven to leave their pleasant oasis called Eden and their offspring *to become a constant wanderer on the earth.*

I would guess just from observation that all animated beings, like buffalo and elephants and robins and whales and locusts and God knows what else that has life, are migratory – in quest of survival, often with nose to the ground and peripheral vision to watch for predators. Human beings are a different kind of animated being. We stand erect so that we can see horizons, behold wide-open space (even landscapes from some thirty thousand feet above). We can extend our very anatomy – making hammers to serve as more durable fists, binoculars to extend our vision far and wide, making shoes as more durable feet, clothing as more durable, protective skin, wheels the better to run with . . . and so on. We are equipped to move, be mobile, cross those horizons that beckon our curiosity. From the Bering Sea to the tip of Argentina, from the Urals to San Francisco Bay!

A fabulous animal, crossing our Rubicons, getting sentimental over lyrics like: *Oh Shenandoah, / I long to see you, / Away, you rolling river. / Oh Shenandoah, / I long to see you, / Away, we're bound away / Across the wide Missouri.* All of our ancestors could have made that their theme song. Or the Conquistador staring at the Pacific – *and all his men / Look'd at each other with wild surmise - / Silent, upon a peak in Darien.* This is our nature. Regardless of the immediate causes of human migration (like hunger, boredom, climate, tyranny, greed or simply hope, we are migratory; we are restless, on the move. How can we prevent being what we ARE.

But our migrating nature is not just geographical in motive: crossing the wide Missouri or the vast Atlantic; or spatial as in: *Fly me to the moon / Let me play among the stars / And let me see what spring is like / On Jupiter and Mars.* Our bodies migrate, its hunger drives us – but we have minds that migrate even more and hunger even more, if we haven't given up hope. Every novel you read, ever great film you watch, every great poem, drama you experience, every book you read stretches your horizons to a fabulous degree – over a lifetime. Take you into centuries past and centuries to come. Many an experience you have (like my meeting Jane) can carry you away.

At age fifteen I boarded a train to carry me to a seminary along tracks that ran through New Jersey into Manhattan and up the Hudson to a destination at which I got off the train – or did I? As time goes by that train has passed through many another station beyond that – to God knows where. Or has it ever occurred to you that this very creed you believe in is the story of a migration of a people whose ancestor was told to “go to the land I will show you” and whose Christ was ever on the move saying *Come, follow me?* Time is mobility. To freeze it is to risk your humanity.

Geoff Wood

* See the Book of Numbers: chapters 22–23:1–8