

{...EXTRACTS...}

Selections from Primary Sources

“EXTRACTS” is an occasional section of New York Irish History that began in 2003. It presents material taken directly from primary sources. Each of these sections provides raw data or uninterpreted information—which hopefully is of interest to readers of this journal. The following extract is a small part of the booklet, Hints to Irishmen, published in 1817 by the Shamrock Society of New York City. The extract reproduced here is in its original language and spelling.

Editor’s Introduction

With the end of warfare between England and France in 1815, the Atlantic was again relatively safe for travel to America, and by 1816 it was clear that immigration to this country from Ireland was increasing dramatically. Among leaders of the Irish in New York City, some of whom had been exiled from Ireland as a consequence of the failed United Irish uprising in 1798, there were concerns that these post-war immigrants succeed in their new homeland and become vital supporters of the American republic. As a consequence, men like Thomas Addis Emmet, James MacNeven, and Thomas O’Conor took several actions to assist newcomers, including formation of the Shamrock Society and publication of the small book titled *Hints to Irishmen; Who intend with their families to make a permanent residence in America*. This slim volume is a mixture of philosophical belief, political analysis, and practical advice. The extract provided here focuses on immigration as a natural right of humans—and on remedies for heat prostration in New York summers. This extract is taken from an original document in the Haliday Collection of Dublin’s Royal Irish Academy. —F.N.

Hints To Irishmen

...That hospitality which, as Mr. Jefferson says, the savages of the wilderness extended to the first settlers arriving in this land, cannot be

denied by a free, civilized, and christian people, to brethren emigrating from the countries of their common fathers; and the exercise of it is peculiarly agreeable to us, who have (some of us) been induced, by a similarity of fate and fortunes with your own, to quit the lands of our nativity, and seek freedom and happiness in America. That hospitality which the wild Arab never violates, and which the American Indian so often exercises to strangers; that sacred virtue is dear to our hearts, which we open to address you in frankness of friendship and sincerity of truth. We bid you welcome to a land of freedom; we applaud your resolution; we commend your judgment in asserting the right of expatriation; a right acknowledged and practiced by people of all nations, from the earliest ages to the present time; England, with her absurd pretensions, not excepted; a right indispensable to liberty and happiness, and which ought never to be surrendered. The free states once established in Asia, recognized it; Greece adopted it. Emigration from thence was uncontrolled; and naturalization, which put the emigrant civility...on a level with the native, was there a thing of course. The Romans avowed and vindicated the right in all its latitude; and this memorable declaration composed part of their code: “Every man has a right to choose the state to which he will belong.” It is a law of nature that we may go wither we list to promote our happiness. It is thus, that the arts, sciences, laws, and civilization itself have journeyed with colonies, from one region to another, from Asia and Egypt to Europe, and from Europe to

America. In making this country your home, your choice does you honour; and we doubt not but your conduct will be equally correct, judicious and honourable....

Even in your state of probation here, as aliens, you will soon perceive that the laws (and ours is a government of laws) are made by the will of the people, through agents called representatives. The will of the majority passes for, and requires the consent of all. Entire acquiescence in the decision of the majority is the vital principle for republics, from which there is no legitimate appeal; for resistance in those opinions is an appeal to force, the vital principle and immediate parent to despotism. It is a fundamental truth in nature, and for those not held in servitude, it is a law in America that men are born equal, and endowed with unalienable rights, of which they can neither divest themselves nor be deprived by others. Slaves may be ruled by the will of one, or a few; but freemen are governed only by the general will.

Strangers as you are, you may derive benefit from the counsel and guidance of friends. If one who has gone the road you are about to travel, by only shewing you how it winds beyond the next hill, does you an act of civility, how much more important would be some information, that must influence your welfare and future fortune. And when you reflect, that the circumstances apparently trivial may make the one, or mar the other, you will not disregard a communication which relates to the business of life.

[Therefore, an important part of what the emigrant must be told is]...related to his personal safety in a new climate. ...Emigrants from Europe usually... [arrive] here during summer, and, everything considered, it is best they should, for, in the middle and eastern states the winter is long, fuel very dear, and employment comparatively scarce at that season.... But if arriving at this time bear more upon their pocket, the heats of the summer are undoubted more trying to their health. In...New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, a northern European usually finds the climate intensely hot from about the middle of June until towards the first of October. The thermometer frequently ranges from 84 to 90, and sometimes above it in the middle of the day; this, to a stranger, who works in the open air, exposed



Illustration: Title page from the Shamrock Society's 1817 booklet for Irish immigrants. Courtesy of the Royal Irish Academy, Haliday Collection.

to the burning sun, is certainly dangerous, and requires some precaution on his part.

First of all he should regulate his diet, and be temperate in the quantity of his food. The American labourer, or working mechanic, who has a better and more plentiful table than any other man in the world of his class, is, for the most part, a small eater, and we recommend to you his example. The European of the same condition, who receives meat or fish, and coffee, at breakfast, meat at dinner, and meat or fish and tea, at supper, an abundance of animal food to which he was unaccustomed, insensibly falls into a state of great repletion, which exposes him to the worst kind of fever during the heats of summer and autumn. He should therefore be quite as abstemious to the quantity of food as of strong drink; and, in addition to this method of preventing sickness, he should take a dose of active physic, every now and then, especially in the hotter months of July and August. By this prudent course an ardent climate will have no terrors, and, after some residence here, he may preserve his health by regimen and exercise alone.

The labourer or mechanic should put off his ordinary clothes, and wear next [to] his skin a

loose flannel shirt, while he works; it should be taken off again when he is done.

The stranger as well as the natives must be particularly careful not to drink cold water after being heated by exposure to the sun, or exercise. Sudden and severe pain of the stomach, and even death are frequently the consequence of such imprudence. The humane society of this city [New York] has published the following directions to be observed in such cases—

- 1st. To avoid drinking water while the body is heated, or during profuse perspiration.
- 2nd. Wash the hands and face with cold water before drinking.
- 3rd. If these precautions have been neglected, and cramps or convulsion have been induced, let a teaspoon of laudanum be given in a cup of spirits and water, and repeat the dose in half an hour, if necessary.
- 4th. At the same time apply hot fermentations of spirits and water to the stomach and bowels, and to the lower extremities, covering the body with a blanket, or immerse the body in a warm baths, if it can be immediately obtained.
- 5th. Inject into the bowels a pint of warm spirits and water, mixed in proportion of one part of the former to two of the latter.

Do you ask by this time, with a view to the ordinary business of life...[what] is America? What sort of people may expect to succeed in it? The immortal Franklin has answered these questions; "America is the land of labour." But it is emphatically the best country on earth for those who will labour. By industry they can earn more wages here than elsewhere in the world. Our governments are frugal, they demand few taxes; so that the earnings of the poor man are left to enrich himself; they are nearly all his own, and not expended on kings and their satellites.

Idlers are out of their elements here, and the being who is technically called a man of rank in Europe is despicable in America. He must become a useful member of society, or he will find no society; he will be shunned by all decent people. Franklin, whose sure counsel is the best that can be given or observed, has said, that it is not advisable for a person to come higher, who has no other quality to recommend him but his birth. In Europe,

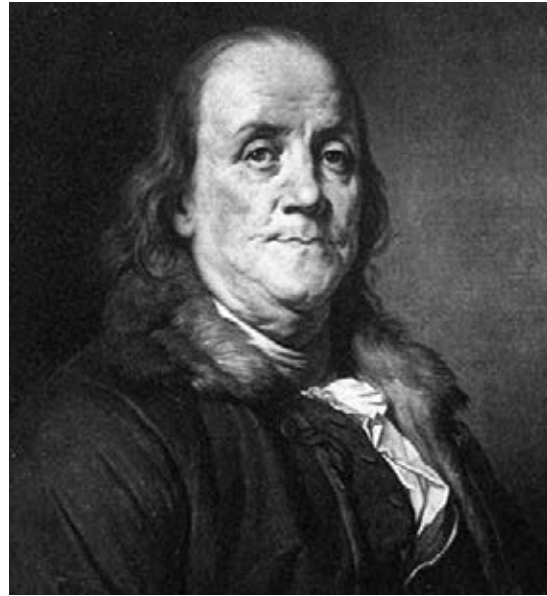


Illustration: In Poor Richard's Almanac, and later in his autobiography, Franklin often identified useful skills and hard work as necessary for success.

indeed, it may have its value, but it is a commodity which cannot be carried to a worse market than that of America, where people do not inquire concerning a stranger, What is he? but, What can he do? If he has any useful art, he is welcome, and if he exercises it, and behaves well, he will be respected by all who know him....

Industrious men need never lack employment in America. Labourers, carpenters, masons, bricklayers, stonecutters, blacksmiths, turners, weavers, farmers, curriers, tailors, and shoemakers, and the useful mechanics generally, are always sure of work and wages. Stonecutters now receive in this city (New-York) two dollars a-day, equal to nine shillings sterling; carpenters, one dollar and eighty-seven and an half cents; bricklayers, two dollars; labourers, from one dollar to one and a quarter:—others in proportion....

Artisans receive better pay in America than in Europe, and can live with less exertion, and more comfort: because they put an additional price on their work, equal to the cost of freight and commission charged by the merchant on importations. But there are not many of the laborious classes whom we would advise to reside, or even loiter, in great towns, because as much will be spent during a long winter as can be made through a toilsome summer, so that a man may be kept a moneyless drudge for life.

But this is not perhaps the worst; his is tempted to become a tippler, by the cheapness and plenty of liquors, and then his prospects are blasted for ever. In few countries is drunkenness more despised than in this. The drunkard is viewed as a person socially dead, shut out from decent intercourse, shunned, despised or abhorred. The pernicious habit is to be guarded against as scrupulously for political as moral considerations. Civil liberty every where rests on self respect, while degradation or voluntary debasement, is one of the causes of despotism....

It is the opinion of some judicious men, that though persons newly arrived ought to go without loss of time into the country; yet it would not be prudent for them to retire all at once to the remote parts of the west; that they ought to stop nearer the sea-board, and learn at little of the mode of doing business. Perhaps this, in some instances, may be advisable, but we think that young men, whose habits are not fixed, cannot pass too speedily to the fine regions beyond the Alleghany. The labourer, however, will find great difference between them and Europe in every thing. The man who was accustomed to the spade, must now use the axe; he who used to dig ditches, will learn to maul rails and make fences. These are extremes that must be met; and the sooner, perhaps, the better....

In our state (of New York) the advantages are great, whether we regard soil or situation, or roads, lakes, and rivers. Few if any states in the union have finer land than the great western district of New York. It has risen exceedingly in a few years, and the price will be much increased as soon as the intended canal, from Lakes Erie and Champlain to the Hudson River, shall be completed. These most useful and magnificent works, will probably be begun next summer, and afford for several years to come, to many thousands of industrious poor men, an opportunity of enriching themselves. If prudent, they may realize their earnings on the spot, and become proprietors, in fee, of land estates in the beautiful country they shall have so greatly improved.

From no other city on the Atlantic can a person sooner reach the country than by means of the Hudson, and the roads that branch from the towns on either of its banks. Lands of good quality may

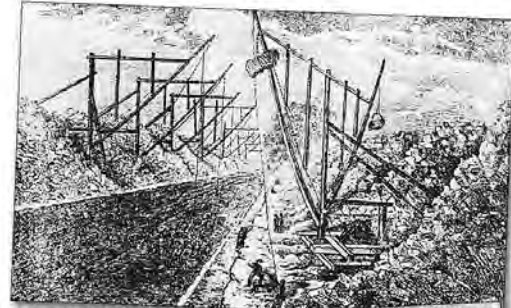


Illustration: (top) Workers labor to construct the Erie Canal. (bottom) Invitation to the Erie Canal Opening Celebration held at Grand Central Station in 1825. Workers included many Irish men.

still be purchased, even in the midland parts of New York, at a reasonable rate.

As every emigrant does not mean to turn farmer, and our wish is to furnish useful hints to various classes, we will here, at the risk of repetition, state the ideas of a gentleman of much experience, respectability, and intelligence, concerning the pursuits of different persons.

Those who have acquired useful trades will, in general, find little difficulty, either in our large cities, or the towns and villages all over the country. There are vacancies for a large portion of them.

Clerks, shopkeepers, or attendants in stores, are seldom wanted; their occupation is an uncertain one; it requires some time too for such persons to acquire the mode of doing business with the same experience as natives, or long residents. In most cases a sort of apprenticeship is to be served; and it would be well for persons newly arrived to engage for some months at low wages, with a view to procure the necessary experience. Six months, or a year, spent in this manner, and for this purpose, will fit a man for making better use of his future years; and he will have no occasion to repent his pains; we would press this on your consideration. ■■■