

“a hotbed for industry and genius”

__ Benjamin Rush __

*Information to Europeans Who Are Disposed
to Migrate to the United States of America*

1790, EXCERPTS

In 1782, Benjamin Franklin published advice to elite Europeans who wondered what opportunities the newly independent nation offered them. Very little, he answered in a piece entitled *Information to Those Who Would Remove to America*, if what you expect is the easy living and preferential treatment guaranteed to men of your class in Europe. Stay on your side of the Atlantic, and send us your industrious hard-working men to help build the fragile new nation. Eight years later another Philadelphia Patriot, Benjamin Rush, offered an update to Franklin's advice. Widely influential in medicine, education, prison reform, and other areas of postwar innovation, Rush reflected the nation's return of confidence after the anxious 1780s. Written after the installation of the first government under the new Constitution, his *Information* projects a clear vision of where-we're-going and, in its closing words, erupts with optimistic buoyancy (and relief).

DEAR SIR,

AGREEABLY to your request contained in your letter of the 29th of August, 1789, I have at last sat down to communicate such facts to you upon the subject of migration to this country as have been the result of numerous inquiries and observation. I am aware that this subject has been handled in a masterly manner by Doctor Franklin¹ in his excellent little pamphlet entitled “Advice to those who would wish to remove to America,” but as that valuable little work is very general and as many important changes have occurred in the affairs of the United States² since its publication, I shall endeavor to comply with your wishes by adding such things as have been omitted by the Doctor and shall accommodate them to the present state of our country.

I shall begin this letter by mentioning the descriptions of people who ought not to come to America.

- I. Men of independent fortunes who can exist only in company and who can converse only upon public amusements³ should not think of settling in the United States. I have known several men of that character in this country who have rambled from state to state, complaining of the dullness of each of them, and who have finally returned and renewed their former connections and pleasures in Europe.

¹ Honorific title; Benjamin Franklin did not have a medical or academic degree.

² *United States* is uncapitalized in the 1790 pamphlet, indicative of the evolving notion of the new nation as a single sovereign entity. See note 6. Uncapitalized proper adjectives are left as such in this selection.

³ I.e., wealthy men who do not need to work and who “exist only” in society and social engagements where the main topics of conversation are the latest plays, concerts, lectures, etc.

- II. Literary men who have no professional pursuits will often languish in America from the want of society.⁴ Our authors and scholars are generally men of business and make their literary pursuits subservient to their interests. A lounge in book stores, breakfasting parties for the purpose of literary conversation, and long attic [refined] evenings, are as yet but little known in this country. Our companies are generally mixed,⁵ and conversation in them is a medley of ideas upon all subjects. They begin as in England with the weather — soon run into politics — now and then diverge into literature — and commonly conclude with facts relative to commerce, manufactures, and agriculture, and the best means of acquiring and improving an estate. Men who are philosophers or poets without other pursuits had better end their days in an old country [i.e., a European nation].
- III. The United States as yet afford but little encouragement to the professors of most of the fine arts. Painting and sculpture flourish chiefly in wealthy and luxurious countries. Our native American portrait painters who have not sought protection and encouragement in Great Britain have been obliged to travel occasionally from one state to another in order to support themselves. The teachers of music have been more fortunate in America. A taste for this accomplishment prevails very generally in our large cities, and eminent masters in that art who have arrived here since the peace [1783] have received considerable sums of money by exercising their profession among us.

I shall now mention those descriptions of people who may better their condition by coming to America.

- I. To the cultivators of the earth [farmers] the United States open⁶ the first asylum in the world. To ensure the success and happiness of an European farmer in our country, it is necessary to advise him either to purchase or to rent a farm which has undergone some improvement.

The business of settling a new tract of land — and that of improving a farm — are of a very different nature. The former must be effected by the native American⁷ who is accustomed to the use of the axe and the grubbing hoe, and who possesses almost exclusively a knowledge of all the peculiar and nameless arts of self-preservation in the woods. I have known many instances of Europeans who have spent all their cash in unsuccessful attempts to force a settlement in the wilderness, and who have afterwards been exposed to poverty and distress at a great distance from friends and even neighbors. I would therefore advise all farmers with moderate capitals [wealth] to purchase or rent improved farms in the old settlements of our states. . . .

- II. MECHANICS and MANUFACTURERS of every description will find certain encouragement in the United States. During the connection of this country with Great Britain, we were taught to believe that agriculture and commerce should be the only pursuits of the Americans, but experiments and reflection have taught us that our country abounds with resources for manufactures of all kinds, and that most of them may be conducted with great advantage in all the states. We are already nearly independent of the whole world for ironwork, paper, and malt liquors; and great progress has been made in the manufactures of glass, potash,⁸ and cloths of all kinds. . . .



⁴ i.e., writers and literary enthusiasts, who are not primarily businessmen, lawyers, doctors, or clergymen, will "languish in America" from the lack of similar men with whom to discuss intellectual and literary issues.

⁵ i.e., our social gatherings are usually mixed by profession, range of interests, and, more so than in Europe, social standing.

⁶ "United States" was still a collective noun at this point, taking a plural verb.

⁷ i.e., white Americans (not referring to Indians).

⁸ Potash: potassium compound used as agricultural fertilizer.

Those mechanical arts which are accommodated to the infant and simple state of a country will bid fairest to succeed among us. Every art [trade] connected with cultivating the earth — building houses and ships, and feeding and clothing the body — will meet with encouragement in this country. The prices of provisions are so different in the different states, and even in the different parts of the same state, and vary so much with the plenty and scarcity of money, that it would be difficult to give you such an account of them as would be useful. I need only remark that the disproportion between the price of labor and of provisions is much greater in every part of the United States than in any part of Europe, and hence our tradesmen everywhere eat meat and butter every day, and most of them realize the wish of Henry IV of France for the peasants of his kingdom by dining not only once but two or three times upon poultry in every week of the year.

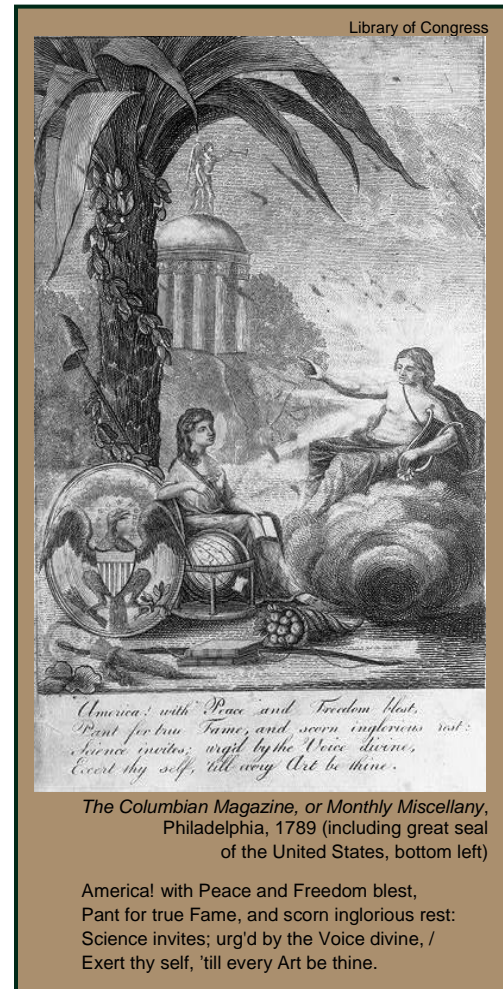
It is a singular fact in the history of the mechanical arts in this country that the same arts seldom descend from father to son. Such are the profits of even the humblest of them that the sons of mechanics generally rise from the lower to the more respectable occupations, and thus their families gradually ascend to the first ranks in society among us. The influence which the prospects of wealth and consequence have in invigorating industry in every line of mechanical business is very great. Many of the first men in America are the sons of reputable mechanics or farmers. . . .

III. LABORERS may depend upon constant employment in the United States, both in our towns and in the country. When they work by the day, they receive high wages, but these are seldom continued through the whole year. A laborer receives annually, with his boarding, washing, and lodging,⁹ from fifteen to eighteen guineas in the middle states. It is agreeable to observe this class of men frequently raised by their industry from their humble stations into the upper ranks of life in the course of twenty or thirty years.

IV. PERSONS who are willing to indent themselves as servants¹⁰ for a few years will find that humble station¹¹ no obstacle to a future establishment in our country. Many men who came to America in that capacity are now in affluent circumstances. Their former situation, where they have behaved well, does not preclude them from forming respectable connections in marriage nor from sharing if otherwise qualified, in the [elected and appointed] offices of our country.

V. The United States continue to afford encouragement to gentlemen of the LEARNED PROFESSIONS, provided they be prudent in their deportment and of sufficient knowledge; for since the establishment of colleges and schools of learning in all our states, the same degrees of learning will not succeed among us which succeeded fifty years ago.

Several lawyers and physicians who have arrived here since the peace are now in good business, and many clergymen, natives of England, Scotland, and Ireland, are comfortably settled in good parishes. A minister of the gospel in a country place must not



The Columbian Magazine, or Monthly Miscellany, Philadelphia, 1789 (including great seal of the United States, bottom left)

America! with Peace and Freedom blest,
Pant for true Fame, and scorn inglorious rest:
Science invites; urg'd by the Voice divine, /
Exert thy self, till every Art be thine.

⁹ Meals, laundry, and room.

¹⁰ Hire themselves out as indentured servants.

¹¹ I.e., low social status of an indentured servant.

expect to have all his salary paid in cash, but he will notwithstanding seldom fail of obtaining a good subsistence from his congregation. . . . The people of America are of all sects, but the greatest part of them are of the independent, presbyterian, episcopal, baptist, and methodist denominations. The principles held by each of these societies in America are the same as those which are held by the protestant churches in Europe, from which they derive their origin.

VI. SCHOOLMASTERS of good capacities and fair characters may expect to meet with encouragement in the middle and southern states. They will succeed better if they confine their instructions to reading, writing, English grammar, and the sciences of number and quantity. These branches of literature are of general necessity and utility, and of course every township will furnish scholars [students] enough for the maintenance of a schoolmaster. Many young men have risen by means of the connections they have formed in this useful employment to rank and consequence in the learned professions in every part of this country.

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is inconceivable how many useful discoveries necessity has produced within these few years in agriculture and manufactures in our country. The same necessity has produced a versatility of genius among our citizens: hence we frequently meet with men who have exercised two or three different occupations or professions in the course of their lives, according to the influence which interest, accident, or local circumstances have had upon them. I know that the peculiarities which have been mentioned in the American character strike a European — who has been accustomed to consider man as a creature of habit, formed by long established governments and hereditary customs — as so many deviations from propriety and order. But a wise man who knows that national characters arise from circumstances will view these peculiarities without surprise, and attribute them wholly to the present state of manners, society, and government in America.

From the numerous competitions in every branch of business in Europe, success in any pursuit may be looked upon in the same light as a prize in a lottery. But the case is widely different in America. Here there is room enough for every human talent and virtue to expand and flourish. This is so invariably true that I believe there is not an instance to be found of an industrious, frugal, prudent European, with sober manners, who has not been successful in business in this country.

. . . To these facts I am happy in being able to add that the years of anarchy, which proved so disgusting to the Europeans who arrived among us immediately after the peace, are now at an end, and that the United States have at last adopted a national government which unites — with the vigor of monarchy and the stability of aristocracy — all the freedom of a simple republic. Its influence already in invigorating industry and reviving credit is universal. There are several peculiarities in this government which cannot fail of being agreeable to Europeans who are disposed to settle in America.

1. The equal share of power it holds forth to men of every religious sect. As the first fruits of this perfection in our government, we already see three gentlemen of the Roman Catholic church [who are] members of the legislature of the United States.¹²
2. Birth in America is not required for holding either power or office in the federal government, except that of president of the United States. In consequence of this principle of justice, not only in the national government, but in all our state constitutions, we daily see the natives of Britain, Ireland, Germany, advanced to the most respectable employments in our country.
3. By a late [recent] act of Congress, only two years' residence in the United States are necessary to entitle foreigners of good character to all the privileges of citizenship. Even that short period of

¹² Thomas Fitzsimons, Pennsylvania; Charles Carroll and Daniel Carroll (brothers), Maryland.

time has been found sufficient to give strangers a visible interest in the stability and freedom of our governments.

It is agreeable to observe the influence which our republican governments have already had upon the tempers and manners of our citizens. Amusement is everywhere giving way to business, and local politeness is yielding to universal civility. We differ about forms and modes in politics, but this difference begins to submit to the restraints of moral and social obligation. Order and tranquility appear to be the natural consequence of a well-balanced republic, for where men can remove the evils of their governments by frequent elections, they will seldom appeal to the less certain remedies of mobs or arms. It is with singular pleasure that I can add further that, notwithstanding the virulence of our dissensions about independence and the federal government, there is now scarcely a citizen of the United States who is not satisfied with both and who does not believe this country to be in a happier and safer situation than it was in the most flourishing years of its dependence upon Great Britain. . . .

From a review of the facts that have been mentioned, you will perceive that the present is the age of reason and action in America. To our posterity [later generations] we must bequeath the cultivation of the fine arts and the pleasures of taste and sentiment. The foreigners who have visited and described our country without making allowances for those peculiarities which arise from our present state of society have done as little honor to their understandings as they have done to human nature. Nor have those Europeans discovered more wisdom who have blended with the American character the accidental disorders which were the offspring of our late public commotions. They resembled the swelling of the sea which succeeds a storm. At present, they have as perfectly subsided as the disorders produced by the civil wars in England in the last century. . . .

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and action in America.*

I shall conclude this long letter by the two following remarks:

- I. If freedom, joined with the facility of acquiring the means of subsistence, have such an influence upon population — and if existence be a title to happiness — then think, sir, what an ocean of additional happiness will be created by the influence which migration to the free and extensive territories of the United States will have upon the numbers of mankind.
- II. If wars have been promoted in all ages and countries by an over proportion of inhabitants to the means of easy subsistence,¹³ then think, sir, what an influence upon the means of supporting human life [that] migration to America and the immense increase of the productions of the earth, by the late improvements in agriculture, will probably have in lessening the temptations and resources of nations to carry on war. The promises of heaven are often accomplished by means in which there is no departure from the common operations of nature. If the events which have been alluded to should contribute in any degree to put an end to wars, it will furnish a noble triumph to your society¹⁴ by showing how much enlightened policy and national happiness are connected with the dictates of Christianity.

I am,

Dear sir,

With great respect,

And sincere regard,

Yours very affectionately,
¹⁵

Philadelphia, April 16, 1790.

¹³ *inhabitants to the means of easy subsistence*: the wealthy who lead easy lives without labor.

¹⁴ "The gentleman to whom this letter is addressed is of the society of the people called quakers." [Society of Friends] [Rush note]

¹⁵ Rush's *Information* was published anonymously — "from a citizen of Pennsylvania" — a common practice at the time.