

HOW THEY GOT ACROSS THE OCEAN

Catholic, Irish and tossed into the wastebasket by an unsympathetic British ministry. The Irish disposition anarchic individualism warred against systematic group colonization.

Despite the casual disarray of the Catholic Irish emigration, it contained within it a deep foundation of order, even logic, in accordance with the traditional Irish pattern. The individual Irishman was tied by inflexible bonds to the complex of intricate family relationships extending beyond immediate consanguinity, which imposed duties, and responsibilities that could be avoided only by his own shame and the censure of an opinion he respected. His responses to these family obligations were almost instinctive, above rationality, to be honored by the call of blood to blood.

So it can be said of Catholic Irish emigration that while as a physical fact it was individual, one by one or two by two, the addition ultimately made a family emigration to America. Behind the young Irish farm laborer or servant maid who set off alone for America was a waiting family, and behind them, the friends.

A letter from a poor railroad worker in Peekskill, New York, to his family in Ireland holds its simple power more than a century later and sums up in unlettered articulateness the heart of Catholic Irish emigration:

Beekskeel march 8th 48

My dear and loving wife and children I received yours of January 20th 1848 which gave me to understand that you were attacked by a Severe Fever but thanks be God that you are Recovered and well as I am at Present thanks be to his kind mercies to us all be on the watch at the Post Office day after day I wont delay in Relieving you as it is a duty encumbered on me by the laws of Church and I hope God will Relieve me. I work on a Railway at 8 shillings per day and pays 18 Shillins per week for my Boarding this is a good Country for them that is able to work and nother person. So I will be able to pay yours passage with the help of God on the First of August next the sending of this sum of money to yous Compells me to let it be Back tel then and I long to see that long wished for hour that I will Embrace yous in my arms there is nothing in this world gives me trouble but you and my dear Children whom I loved as my life. Be Pleased to let me know how my two sons is Patrick and Franciss and not Fergetting my dear Father and mother Friend and neighbours not Forgetting your sister Bridget thank God she was to mind yous in your sickness and sorrows which I will never forget to her I expect to go to newyork on the 17th of march to send you tis Bill of Six Pounds which you will Get Cash for in the Provensil Bank of Ireland I will sent

it in the Revd Patrick ogara in care For you I feel very sorry for sorry for my
Brother Fancis that lived at St. John I Fear he is dead.

Don't answer this letter tull you Receive the next in which the money will Be for
you.

Keep your heart as good spareed you, so long you will be shortly in the lands of
Promise and live happy with me and our children.

No more at Present

From your Faithful husband till death

Thos Garry

I was ready to go to york to pay Passge for you and the children but I consider
yous would not stand the wracking of the sea till yous be nourished for a time.

Potter, GEO.

TO THE GOLDEN DOOR

Little Brown and Co., Boston, 1960