

## Verses on Norwegian emigration to America, 1853

### Introduction

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Between 1836 and 1865, approximately 55,000 Norwegians sailed to the United States.<sup>1</sup> Like most immigrants, they sought opportunities that didn't exist at home—religious freedom, economic security, land ownership, and educational and social advancement. Most of the emigrants were members of the lowest class, landless farmers who were subject to oppressive social conventions and treated with scorn in their native country.

This anonymous poem,<sup>2</sup> “A Farewell Ode to Emigrants on Their Journey to America,” written in 1853 from the perspective of someone who stayed in Norway, illuminates the reasons some left Norway and praises the wonders of America—the natural resources and beauty of the land as well as the opportunities to prosper through hard work and possibly an advantageous marriage:

O that all that you here bitterly must manage without,  
 you in that distant safe harbor will get tenfold back.  
 In America's valleys abounding with flowers,  
 where the earth does not mock the sweat of its grower.

Many who traveled to America sent letters back home describing their experiences to attract new settlers. The narrator picks up on that practice and makes the following suggestion to his compatriots overseas:

To those left behind here in Norway's valleys  
 write many a true and loving word,  
 for them it will soothe the pain of yearning  
 and create desire to leave the North . . .

And in a thousand years after the North will be deserted  
 and the Norwegian's offspring by the banks of Missouri  
 will behold freedom's beautiful red sunrise  
 shining there in wealth, light and peace,  
 then forgotten will be the yearning and hardship and miserable days,  
 in the Norwegians' new and happy home!

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1. Theodore C. Blegen, *Norwegian Migration to America, 1825–1860* (Northfield, MN: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1931), 19–20.

2. The verses are written in Danish, as Denmark had ruled in Norway for 400 years and Danish was the primary written language. After Norway split from Denmark in 1814, Norwegians developed their own written language, which gradually replaced Danish as the preferred literary language.

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### Excerpt

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You are going away to maybe never no more  
Norway see, your homeland behold.  
O that all that you here bitterly must manage without,  
you in that distant safe harbor will get tenfold back.  
In America's valleys abounding with flowers,  
where the earth does not mock the sweat of its grower,  
on your journey there we pray that God  
will look down upon your wandering with blessings!  
[...]

To those left behind here in Norway's valleys  
write many a true and loving word,  
for them it will soothe the pain of yearning  
and create desire to leave the North  
where brave women, children and men only are provided  
scorn and shame, destitution and poverty.  
You have it better then, when you speak,  
when you beckon them to come where you went.

### Questions for Discussion

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Read the introduction and the translation of the poem. Study the image of the printed poem, which is written in Danish, and read the explanation for the use of Danish in footnote 2. Then apply your knowledge of American history and immigration to answer the following questions:

1. To which economic class of Norwegians is this poem addressed?
2. Describe the conditions in Norway that led the poet to commend Norwegians who left their homeland.
3. According to the poet, in which ways will life be better for those who travel to America?
4. Why do you think the poet chose the form of an ode to express his opinion on the subject of Norwegian immigration to America?

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### Translation

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A Farewell Ode to Emigrants on Their Journey to America.

Mel. Bertram's Farewell Ode to France.<sup>3</sup>

1.

You are going away to maybe never no more  
 Norway see, your homeland behold.  
 O that all that you here bitterly must manage without,  
 you in that distant safe harbor will get tenfold back.  
 In America's valleys abounding with flowers,  
 where the earth does not mock the sweat of its grower,  
 on your journey there we pray that God  
 will look down upon your wandering with blessings!

2.

The hand of the Father then loyally accompany you  
 on your journey across the ocean blue!  
 And lead you in your future days,  
 preventing fever, pestilence and bad luck from reaching you;  
 no snake bites, or vermin there approaching  
 where you build your peaceful abode,  
 No harm from the wild! – Our Father gently protect  
 you all! – Healthy, strong and happy be.

3.

And God who is the guardian of innocence,  
 his eyes will keep vigil over your small ones;  
 no storm, nor fire will destroy your huts,  
 and you will not suffer from livelihood's bitter sorrows!  
 Yes, O that you will by Sabina's beautiful beaches  
 get to watch the wonderful fruits of your toil and sweat!  
 "We Norwegians are," that thought should uplift you,  
 when you find the day oppressive and hot.

4.

When longing for home weighs down on your soul,  
 then think: "our right home country is the place  
 where we actually get paid for all our hard labor,

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3. The verses were intended to be sung to what was probably a well-known melody, "Bertram's Farewell Ode to France," possibly "Gen. Bertrand's Afskedsquad til Frankrig."

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where hunger dare not approach us,  
 moreover there is more of God's wonderful sky here  
 than out North, our home country of yore,  
 and the top soil is fertile, all nature's abundance  
 is rich in its diversity, that cannot be denied."

### 5.

When you in a better home country stand,  
 don't forget your friends in the cold North,  
 that will never on your coast land;  
 but trudge heavily on Norway's barren soil.  
 Send them a letter, a penny with a picture of freedom  
 so they with affection can stare at it,  
 on the ideal they can imagine,  
 in helmet and armor joyfully standing strong.

### 6.

To those left behind here in Norway's valleys  
 write many a true and loving word,  
 for them it will soothe the pain of yearning  
 and create desire to leave the North  
 where brave women, children and men only are provided  
 scorn and shame, destitution and poverty.  
 You have it better then, when you speak,  
 when you beckon them to come where you went.

### 7.

In never ending struggle like brothers together you should  
 as worthy is for men from the old North  
 fight manly under song and joy  
 to provide your family with bread and fertile soil.  
 Thankful to God you spend your days  
 on what is honorable and right; –  
 there is progress – it only regresses  
 when your actions are lowly and bad.

### 8.

My friend, I wish you a Yankee daughter  
 as wife, – beautiful and rich she must be,  
 and virtuous, – one who there will be a good replacement

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for the women that you here could not get,  
 that there in quiet clean and domestic joy  
 you truly can enjoy the best dream of your youth  
 what fate here would not provide you  
 is wonderfully given to you at Sabina's stream!

9.

And in a thousand years after the North will be deserted  
 and the Norwegian's offspring by the banks of Missouri  
 will behold freedom's beautiful red sunrise  
 shining there in wealth, light and peace,  
 then forgotten will be the yearning and hardship and miserable days,  
 in the Norwegians' new and happy home! –  
 Farewell, farewell! and the Lord be with you  
 on your way wherever you head forth.

10.

Thanks for your good company here! Do know from me  
 my wishes and warm prayers to God  
 hopefully not in vain I am raising  
 for your wellbeing: O for the young strong sprouts  
 of Norwegian stock in America to progress  
 to the delight and luck of father and mother  
 and all good! Salvation you will enjoy  
 when you one day leave this earth!

11.

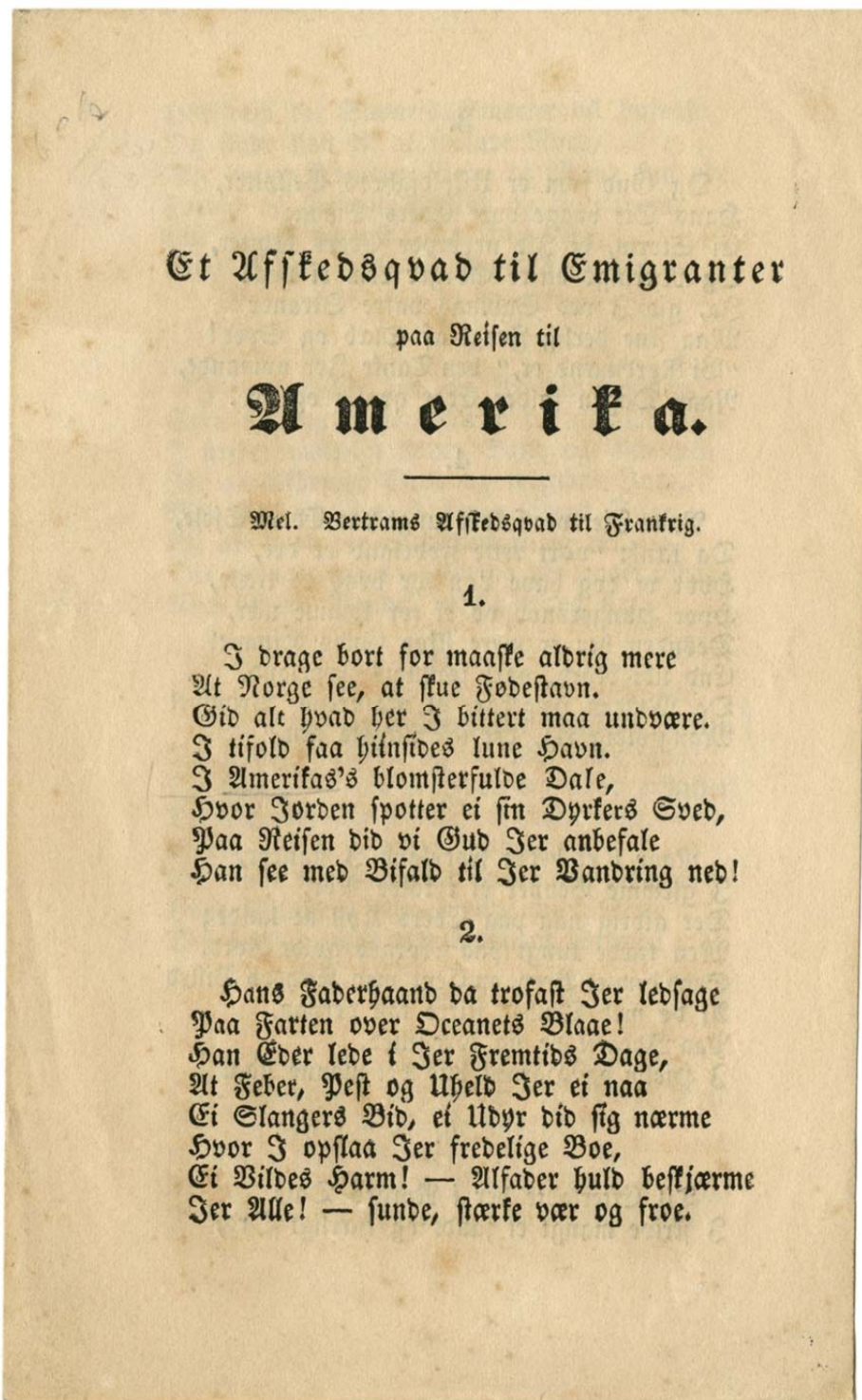
As belief is best shown in the man's deed,  
 that the one who always acts right and well,  
 is dearest to God, therefore also should be praised  
 that freedom of spirit, that for happiness and luck  
 to all, in America must prevail;  
 there a man is not asked about his belief,  
 to each one fairly life's mystery is solved  
 he enjoys the waning moments of his life into death with calm.

Hamar 1853.

Printed at Thorv. A. Hansen's printing house.

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## Images



“Et Afskedsquad til Emigranter paa Reisen til Amerika [A Farewell Ode to Emigrants on Their Journey to America],”  
Hamar, Norway, 1853, p. 1. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09535)

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## 3.

Dg Gud som er Uskyldigheds Beskytter,  
 Hans Dje vaage over Eders Smaa;  
 Ei Storm, ei Ild nedbryde Eders Hytter,  
 Dg Nærings bittere Sorger dem ei naa!  
 Ja, gid I ved Sabinas vakre Strande  
 Maa skue herlig Frugt af Støb og Sved!  
 "Vi Nordmænd er," den Tanke Jer opmande,  
 Naar Dagen falder Eder qualm og hed.

## 4.

Naar Hjemvee falder tungt paa Eders Sjele,  
 Da tænk: "vort rette Fødeland er der,  
 Hvor vi dog have Løn for hvad vi træle,  
 Hvor Hungersnød os ei tør komme nær,  
 Desuden her er mere skøn Guds Himmel  
 End udi Nord, vort fordums Fødeland,  
 Dg Mulden frugtbar, al Naturens Brimmel  
 Mangfoldig rig, det ikke nægtes kan."

## 5.

Naar i et bedre Fødeland I stander,  
 I glemme Venner ei i kolde Nor,  
 Der aldrig naa paa Eders Kyst at lande;  
 Men træde tungt paa Norges golde Jord.  
 Send dem et Brev, en Cent med Friheds Billed  
 At de med Omhed stirre kan derpaa,  
 Paa Idealet de sig forestilled,  
 I Hjelm og Harnisk blid det moune staa.

## 6.

Til Efterladte her i Norges Dale  
 I skrive mangt et sandt og hjærtligt Ord,

"Et Afskedsquad til Emigranter paa Reisen til Amerika [A Farewell Ode to Emigrants on Their Journey to America],"  
 Hamar, Norway, 1853, p. 2. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09535)

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Hos dem det Savnets Smerter vil husvæle  
 Og skabe Lyst til at forlade Nord,  
 Der brave Dvinder, Børn og Mænd kun yde  
 Foragt og Skjændsel, Nød og Fattigdom.  
 Har I det bedre da, da Eder lyde,  
 Naar I dem vinke did hvorhen I kom.

7.

I evigt stræbe bør som Brødre sammen,  
 Som værdigt er for Mænd fra gamle Nord  
 I strider mandigt under Sang og Gammen  
 Jer at tilkjæmpe Brød og frugtbar Jord.  
 Med Tak til Gud I bruge Eders Dage  
 Til alt hvad der er hæderligt og ret; —  
 Det fremad gaaer — kun da det gaaer tilbage  
 Naar Eders Vandel nedrig er og slet.

8.

Min Ven, jeg onsker dig en Yankees Datter  
 Til Kone, — skøn og rig hun være maae,  
 Og dydig, — En som der dig godt erstatter  
 De Dvinder som ei her du kunde faae,  
 At der i stille reen og huslig Glæde  
 Du sande kan din Ungdoms bedste Drom;  
 Hvad Skjæbnen her ei vilde dig tilstæde  
 Dig herligt gives ved Sabinas Strom!

9.

Og tusind Aar herefter Nor staar øde,  
 Og Nordmænds Afkom ved Misfæuris Bred,  
 Vil skue Friheds skønne Morgenrøde  
 At skinne der i Velstand, Lys og Fred,  
 Da glemt er Savn og Nød og Kammers Dage  
 I Nordmænds nye og lykkelige Hjem! —

“Et Afskedsquad til Emigranter paa Reisen til Amerika [A Farewell Ode to Emigrants on Their Journey to America],”  
 Hamar, Norway, 1853, p. 3. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09535)



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Far vel, Far vel! og Herren Jer ledsage  
Paa Eders Veie hvor I end gaa frem.

10.

Tak for godt Samvær her! I mig nok kjende  
Mit Dnske og min varme Bøn til Gud  
Forgjæves ei jeg haaber at opsende  
For Eders Held: Gid unge stærke Stud  
Af Nordmænds Slægt i Amerika fremsthyde  
Til Lyst og held for Fader og for Moer  
Og alle Gode! Salighed i nyde  
Naar I engang forlade denne Jord!

11.

Som Troen bedst af Mandens Gjerning vides,  
At den som stedse handler ret og vel,  
Den Gud er kjærest, derfor og bør prises  
Den Mandens Frihed, som til Lyst og Held  
for Alle, i Amerika mon raade;  
Man spørger der ei Manden om hans Troe,  
For hver Retfærdig løst er Livets Gaade  
Han nyder Livets Held i Døden Roe.

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**Hamar 1853.**

Trykt i Thorv. A. Hansens Bogtrykkeri.

“Et Afskedsquad til Emigranter paa Reisen til Amerika [A Farewell Ode to Emigrants on Their Journey to America],”  
Hamar, Norway, 1853, p. 4. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09535)