

Towning Street.

1st December 1847.

THE BRITISH PROVINCES IN NORTH AMERICA.

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Colonial Land and Emigration Office,
20 November 1847.

Sir,

I, in compliance with Earl Grey's directions, we have carefully perused the various communications from Canada and New Brunswick on the sufferings which have attended the immigration of this year. We now proceed to furnish the Report required from us upon them; and in so doing, we shall not confine ourselves to proceedings belonging to this Board, but shall equally mention in their place the measures of Government, and any facts requiring to be generally known, in order that, as we understand Lord Grey to desire, the whole subject may be brought under review together, in a convenient shape for the information of the Provincial Legislatures, and for consideration in this country.

Colonial Land and Emigration Commissioners to B. Hawes, Esq. November 1847.

Representations on the sickness and distress in British America have been received from public bodies, which, even if the gravity of the occasion was not in itself apparent, must have commanded attention from the weight due to their own authority. The Crown has been addressed by both Houses of the Canadian Legislature, as well as by the Corporation of Montreal. In New Brunswick the Legislature was not sitting during most of the immigration, but an earnest appeal has been received from the Common Council of St. John, the great port of arrival in that province. All of these addresses agree in representing, that not only has the recent immigration introduced disease which has spread to the resident population, and in various ways swelled the amount of distress, but also that it consisted to a large extent of destitute, vagrant or helpless classes; and while every disposition is expressed by the authorities to receive their fellow-countrymen hospitably, they insist upon the necessity of devising means to prevent the recurrence of this year's sufferings.

Representations from the British Provinces.

We trust we may be permitted, at the outset, to express the deep concern with which we have read these accounts of the ravages of disease amongst bodies of people about whom our duties had necessarily engaged us in much correspondence, and for whose protection we can truly affirm that, during the trying season which has elapsed, our time and thoughts were constantly occupied in endeavouring to secure a faithful and vigorous exercise of such powers as the law affords. But, instead of dwelling on sentiments of regret, which must be shared by every person of humanity, we shall proceed at once to the practical questions which arise out of the subject.

Two topics, it will be observed, have to be considered; viz., the sickness, and the destitute or helpless condition of the people who emigrated. These grounds of complaint appear distinct from one another. For should the former admit of being more effectually opposed in future years by any new regulations, it might still remain a question whether persons of unsuitable age or habits could be successfully prohibited from effecting, or proprietors be prevented from assisting them to effect, their removal to the colonies. Both evils, we believe, to the extent to which they prevailed in the recent season, will be found traceable to the extraordinary state of suffering in Ireland. The chief questions that will suggest themselves are probably, what were the causes of these misfortunes, whether they could have been averted this year, and whether they admit of prevention hereafter.

Two distinct evils; viz. the sickness, and the class of the emigrants.

Before proceeding to more general considerations, there are two preliminary statements which appear to us essential to remove misconception. In the first place, we would point to the enormous extent of the emigration. In 1846, which was a year of larger emigration than any that preceded, it amounted to 129,851 persons. But in the first three quarters of the present year the emigration has extended to no less than 240,732 persons, almost the whole of them consisting of Irish emigrants to North America. Whether the probability of this vast efflux of people ought to have led to any special legislative measures, is a question which we by no means propose to pass over or neglect. It will be considered in its proper place. But in the meantime, it is important to bear in mind, that the very fact of the departure of such enormous and totally unprecedented multitudes, and still more the cause by which it was produced, could not fail, with the best arrangements, greatly to augment the probability of suffering and distress.

Enormous extent of the emigration.

In the next place, it is necessary distinctly to remember that none of the people were in any way selected or sent out by the Government. Nor does there even appear reason to conclude that any very large proportion of them were sent out by their landlords. On the contrary, we are assured on high authority, that long beforehand, the people were engaged in their preparations to escape from the

Not selected by the Government.