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REPORT

OF THE

GENERAL RELIEF COMMITTEE.

UPON THE

Correspondence

BETWEEN THE

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES

AND THE

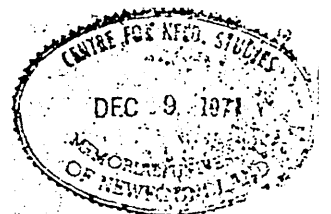
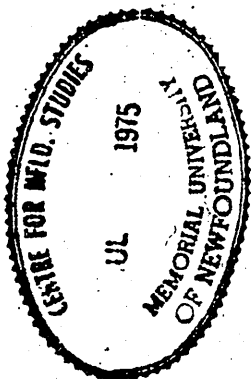
GOVERNOR OF NEWFOUNDLAND.

THE SUBJECT OF THE FIRE AT ST. JOHN'S, AND THE MEASURES ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE RELIEF OF THE SUFFERERS.

TOGETHER WITH

A MEMORIAL TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE EARL GREY.

FOUNDED UPON THE SAME.



ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND:
HENRY WINTON.

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REPORT.

THE General Committee appointed for the Relief of the sufferers by the calamitous fire of the 9th of June, 1846, have had under their notice, since the Report of their proceedings was made up and sent to the Press, certain copies or extracts of correspondence between the Secretary of State and the Governor, or Administrator of the Government, of Newfoundland, and the measures adopted for the Relief of the sufferers; and they acknowledge, with great pleasure and satisfaction, the gratifying testimony which has been exhibited of the parental sympathy of the British Government towards a portion of its subjects resident in this Colony under circumstances of great privation and distress, in the munificent donation of the sum of £30,000, to which has been added, under the sanction of the Queen's letter addressed to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the further sum of £31,516 — making a total of £61,516.

But there are one or two topics embraced in the correspondence to which they advert, which, in the opinion of the Committee, have especial claims upon their consideration; and which they proceed to notice not only with a view to set themselves right with the community on those points contained in the correspondence which have a tendency unwarrantably to prejudice them; but, with a view also of affording to the Parent Government some information upon other topics on which they venture to think that the Government have been permitted to fall into error, a result which might happily have been avoided if the Relief Committee had in the course of these transactions been made acquainted with the nature of the correspondence then subsisting between the Government and the Executive here. Besides all this, the ultimate appropriation of a considerable amount of money, the residue of the Parliamentary grant, and of the contributions under the Queen's letter, is involved in so much mystery and concealment that in justice to themselves, and to those for whose benefit a Committee was appointed at all, they entertain a very natural anxiety to have explained. Before the Committee proceed to an examination of the correspondence

which follows, they think it due to themselves to state, with reference to a note appended to a despatch of Sir John Harvey to Earl Grey, under date the 18th August, intimating the appointment of a commission, and the reason assigned for that appointment, that they stand in no way chargeable with the imputation laid upon them by Sir John, unconscious, as they totally are, of the smallest dereliction in the discharge of the duties assigned them.

Referring to the public proceedings which have taken place, and in the order in which they have occurred, since the period of the awful calamity which has given birth to them, the attention of the Committee is first drawn to the fact that on the 3d day of July, 1846, the House of Assembly, then in session, presented an address to Sir John Harvey, requesting His Excellency to represent to the Home Government the importance of ordering the erection of public buildings, for the purpose of allaying the apprehensions of the population as to the diffusion of employment. The object was to solicit a grant from the Imperial Government towards the erection of such buildings.—See pages 29, 30, of the *Correspondence*.

And by a despatch dated 18th August, Earl Grey states to Sir John Harvey that it has been suggested to him that as the whole amount of subscriptions at home and in the colonies will be considerable, it would be desirable to apply a part of the grant already at the Governor's disposal to the re-erection of the official buildings, which must otherwise be replaced by taxation. Sir John is therefore instructed, unless it would interfere with his previous arrangements, to reserve a portion of the Parliamentary grant until the expediency of the application just mentioned can be further considered.—P. 31.

Here, then, it is, that the Committee observe the first oblique tendency—the first attempt to diverge from the original and straight-forward intention of appropriating the whole public contributions towards the relief of the sufferers by the fire. They acquit the House of Assembly, in their appeal through Sir John Harvey to the Home Government for an imperial grant in aid of the public buildings, from any attempt to mislead the Government; but they perceive that the application itself, coupled with the prospect of a very large amount of contributions, suggested the idea that in the erection of the public works the labouring classes and the mechanics would find ample employment and a sufficient recompense for their labour.

On the 6th September Colonel Law replied to the foregoing despatch by stating that Sir John had reserved £5,000 out of the government grant of £30,000, to meet unforeseen demands;—that of the remaining £25,000, a considerable sum had already been, or was in course of distribution; but the Colonel hoped to be enabled to add some portion of it to the £5,000 already reserved, to be made available in the manner contemplated by his Excellency.—P. 36.

On the 23d September, Earl Grey communicated his views as to the mode of distribution, and recommends that the middle classes should

be provided with means (of which they themselves were to contribute one-half) of rebuilding their houses, thus affording employment for the labouring population. He thinks that by thus economizing and applying the funds there would probably be a large surplus, which may be devoted to the erection of public buildings, thus further increasing the means of employing the working classes.—Pp. 47, 48.

To the foregoing Colonel Law replied on the 25th September, stating that 29,000 sterling of the Government grant had already been distributed—stated also, the system which had been adopted for agreeing upon the awards by the Commission and Relief Committee—which system could not, without much complaint, be interfered with; and that the plan suggested of relief being in some instances made contingent on an equal amount being contributed by individuals, although good in theory is not suited to our circumstances.—P. 52.

Thus, then, so far as anything in the correspondence appears to the contrary, the intention of applying any part of the relief funds to the erection of public buildings, appears virtually to have been almost abandoned. The Committee employ the term *virtually* because there exists a very general apprehension that the still unappropriated monies are at least in part to be devoted to that purpose, a measure which the Committee hope to make appear, would be unjust towards a class of sufferers who have as yet shared either not at all or but comparatively trifling in any of the Government bounty.

None can more deeply lament than the Committee do, the painful fact that the Episcopal Church in this town became a prey to the devouring element upon the deplorable occurrence which they all so vividly recollect. It is remarkable that it was the only place of public worship which fell in the general catastrophe, and there was, and still is, a kindly desire on the part of the inhabitants, of whatever denominational creed, to see it restored, at least in all its original simplicity. It was a plain, unpretending edifice, constructed of wood, as all other places of worship were. It was commodious and convenient; but it was an old building, rapidly approaching to decay, so much so that measures had been taken for the construction of a new one of more durable materials. Subscriptions had been raised, and a large quantity of cut stone had been imported and deposited upon the ground, for the purpose of proceeding with the erection, and the foundation stone had been already laid. In exactly this condition of affairs the fire occurred.—With these preliminary observations upon this part of the subject the Committee desire to draw public attention to that portion of the correspondence under their review which has immediate bearing upon it.

They find that on the 10th September last, Colonel the Hon. Robert Law, then Administering the Government of the colony, transmitted a despatch to Earl Grey, enclosing a memorial from the Lord Bishop and others to the Secretary for the Home Department, for which he extracts the

favourable consideration of the noble earl, in consequence of the severe loss sustained by the Protestant Episcopalians, the destruction of their church, the impossibility of their rebuilding it, and the strong fact of all the monies raised under the Queen's letter being contributed by members of that communion. [It should be observed that the intimation of the Queen's letter having been issued to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, authorizing them to cause subscriptions to be made in the churches throughout the country on behalf of the sufferers by the fire, was contained in a despatch from Earl Grey to the Administrator of the Government, under date the 3d September — P. 47.] The memorial sets forth that memorialists had heard with feelings of the deepest gratitude that Her Majesty had been graciously pleased to issue her royal letter authorizing a collection in the churches of the establishment throughout England, for the relief of the distress occasioned by the calamitous fire — that the only place of public worship destroyed was the Church of St. John — that the losses which had fallen on the members of the Church of England precluded all hope of the church being restored by local contributions — that the special appeal made in England on this behalf was necessarily prejudiced by the simultaneous appeal on behalf of those who had suffered temporal loss — and that the collections under the Queen's letter would be gathered wholly from members of the Church, whilst a very large majority of those to whose benefit they will be applied here will not be of that communion. Which memorialists pray may be taken into favourable consideration. — Pp. 49, 50.

There seems to be one fact disclosed in this memorial which was either wholly unknown or, at least, entirely lost sight of — that the *especial* appeal to the people of England on behalf of the new Church in St. John's was still kept alive, and existed contemporaneously with the general appeal which was made last year on behalf of the sufferers by the fire, to which, as it will be seen by and by, a claim is set up for one-half, for the same identical purpose with that for which the special appeal was then going forward. Upon this circumstance the Committee refrain from all comment; but they proceed with the facts of the case.

Despatch dated November 17, from Earl Grey to Colonel Law, contains copy of Sir George Grey's answer to the foregoing, together with correspondence between the Bishop of London and Earl Grey in reference to the appropriation of a portion of the fund raised under the Queen's letter to the rebuilding of the Church. Earl Grey has no objection to a limited portion of the fund being applied in the manner desired by the Committee in London, at whose request the Queen's letter was issued. Colonel Law is instructed to place one of the Clergy of the Church of England, or one of the Churchwardens, upon the Relief Committee, in addition to the present Committee, if it was the fact, as it had been alleged, that it did not comprise any member of the Church. — P. 50.

But upon whom, as with what especial object in view, the misrepresentation was made to Earl Grey that there was no member of the Episcopal Church upon the Relief Committee, the Committee decline to express their opinion.

only was the Rector of the Church, but so also were several of his most respectable parishioners, placed upon that body—indeed the gentleman who presided at all the meetings is an Episcopalian himself, and so also is the Secretary. If, in answer to this, it is attempted to shift the ground by saying that instead of the Relief Committee the Government commission meant, there is again an untruth, for among the five or six commissioners one at least was a member of the Church.

On the 17th November Earl Grey acknowledged the receipt of the Lord Bishop's memorial, and stated that he had forwarded the same to the Secretary of State for the Home Department. The noble Earl himself entertained no objection to a limited portion of the fund being applied in the manner desired by the committee in London, at whose instance the Queen's letter was issued. This despatch contained an enclosure, being a copy of a letter from Sir George Grey, for the information of Earl Grey, in which Sir George expresses himself to the effect that he thinks it right that arrangements should be made by which the re-building of the Church may be among the objects to which the sum so collected will be applied, Sir George having reason to believe that an expectation that such would be the case was entertained by the Bishops and Clergy through whom the collections had been made.—P. 51.

A letter from the Lord Bishop of London, 19th Nov., to Earl Grey, states that before the issuing of the Queen's letter he had written to Sir George Grey, stating his opinion, and that of the Clergy generally, that as the money would be collected exclusively from members of the Church of England, a reasonable proportion ought to be applied to the re-building of the Church. That Sir George stated that no alteration could be conveniently made in the form of the Queen's letter, but that the arrangement suggested might be made by the London committee, with whom would rest the appropriation of the money. That a subsequent letter from the Lord Mayor had assured him that a considerable part of the collection should be applied in the manner proposed. He had now been informed that the London Committee would not be entrusted with the appropriation, which would be handed over to a committee in Newfoundland, not one of which, it is stated, belongs to the Church, or of which a large majority are of other communions, and that no part of the money can be applied to the rebuilding of the Church. He (the Bishop of London) felt himself bound, if such should be the case, to protest in the strongest manner against it. Begs that Earl Grey would give him such an assurance upon the subject as may remove the anxiety occasioned to many by the statement referred to.—P. 51.

The Committee do not for a moment entertain the belief that all the funds raised under the authority of the Queen's letter were contributed exclusively by members of the Church of England—they suppose, and with some grounds for the supposition, that very many Dissenters from the Church contributed largely towards the common fund, and aided in the one great object of benevolence towards their fellow-subjects in this colony without any regard to the particular religious denomination to which they belonged. But admitting, for the sake of argument, that the funds were

have been so handsomely contributed were raised from the pockets of the members of the Church of England exclusively, is it proper and christian-like that such a circumstance should dam up the current of public charity or in any degree impede the full tide of it?

To the Lord Bishop's letter Earl Grey replied on the 16th November, stating that he was about to transmit a despatch directing the Administrator of the Government to apply a portion of the money raised under the Queen's letter to the re-building of the church.—*P. 52.*

On the 24th November the Lord Bishop of Newfoundland again wrote to Earl Grey, desiring to know what portion of the collections would be placed at his disposal. The Lord Mayor had stated to several of the Bishops that it was the intention that two-thirds or three-fourths of the amount collected should be devoted to that purpose, and this had been thought to be conclusive. Such an appropriation would be in accordance with the expectation of the inhabitants generally of St. John's. Prays to be certified in this matter, as he is desirous to make no further delay in his return to St. John's. Begs an interview.—*P. p. 53, 54.*

The Committee are utterly at a loss to conceive upon what possible grounds it could be assumed that two-thirds or three-fourths of a sum raised ostensibly for the purpose of relieving the sufferings endured by a people under such an afflicting dispensation — how so large a portion of it, not devoted to the construction of a Parish Church suitable and necessary for religious worship, but to a magnificent Cathedral, could be considered as in accordance with the expectations of the general inhabitants of this town. So far were the inhabitants generally from any expectation of the sort that there is a strong and almost universal feeling adverse to the Lord Bishop's views. Had the recommendation of Colonel Law, contained in his despatch of the 10th December, been acted upon, and one-fourth of the whole amount been appropriated for this purpose, no serious objection would have been urged.

But Earl Grey, on the 26th November, to the Lord Bishop, replies, that it was not then in his power, from the information that could be obtained in that country, to determine what proportion of the amount raised should be applied to the re-building of the Church — that must depend upon the nature and extent of other demands, of which the local authorities alone had the means of judging. He had instructed the application of a portion of the funds, and could do no more.—*P. 54.*

The Lord Bishop of Newfoundland, again to Earl Grey, December 4, declares himself unwilling to appear importunate or troublesome, but his own letters from St. John's seem to supply the required, and he trusted, sufficient information, and which may be relied on as correct. His correspondent was a clergyman and member of the Relief Committee. He says that on that day "they had gone through the last précis of the commission. The sum expended amounted to about £20,000 currency, in meeting which half the Government grant of £20,000 had been expended, and about £14,000 of private subscriptions, and of the latter there was a

balance in hand of £5,000. It was considered that the unexpended residue of private subscriptions would be more than enough to satisfy the claims of those who were entitled to a further instalment. The Government, both local and home, intend, I believe, to appropriate the remaining moiety of the Imperial grant (which has just arrived in hard sovereigns) to the restoration of official buildings. Then comes the question, *What is to be done with the Queen's letter collections?* The Bishop does not wish to trouble Earl Grey with further extracts, but the above seems to shew that there are actually in St. John's nearly £85,000 unemployed, and almost, it would seem, uncalled for. His (the Lord Bishop's) friend thought with many others, that if any additional large sum be appropriated to the sufferers by the fire, it would do more harm than good. The Lord Bishop, therefore, hopes that Earl Grey will find and grant that the whole residue of the Queen's letter fund now remaining in England may be appropriated without inconvenience to the rebuilding of the Church. His Lordship asks whether there is any necessity of putting the monies collected through the Queen's letter into the acting Governor's hands? He would suggest that the Government at home might more conveniently direct the application and prescribe the guarantees or certificates, if it might not be put under his control. He alluded to the residue reserved for rebuilding the Church.—P. 56.

Letter from Earl Grey to the Lord Bishop, dated 15th December:—it was not in the power of Earl Grey to issue any directions respecting the appropriation of these funds until he had been in possession of the Report which he was expecting on the subject from the officer administering the Government of Newfoundland.—Pages 56.

Colonel Law to Earl Grey, 26th November—in explanation of some circumstances connected with the funds derived from the Government and other sources. He concurs in the advantage to be derived from a portion of the Government grant being reserved for the re-erection of official buildings, or other public purposes connected with the general interests of the colony, and had taken every step which he had thought likely to effect in this respect. Wished directions to retain the balance of the Government grant now in the Commissariat chest, to await His Lordship's further instructions.—P. 57.

In reply, 23d December, Colonel Law is authorized to retain in his hands the remaining portion of the Government fund (£15,000) until the receipt of final instructions for its appropriation.—P. 59.

Another application from the Lord Bishop to Earl Grey (17th December) states, that after the second instalment to the sufferers there will be a large balance of the Government grant, exclusive of the Queen's letter collections. Hopes the appropriation for the Episcopal Church will be made without delay. The residue from the Queen's letter might in reason and justice be applied to the rebuilding of the Church.—P. 58.

To which, on the 22d December, the noble Earl replied that he had received by the last Mail a despatch from the acting Governor of Newfoundland, confirming certain statements (as to the payments which had been made, and the funds remaining), and that he (Earl Grey) had thought it right to direct the Governor to reserve for the purpose of rebuilding the Church one-half of the total amount of collections.

It is proper to state that between the date of the foregoing despatch and

his reception here, Colonel Law replied to Earl Grey's despatch of the 17th December, and recommended one-third or one-fourth of the money collected under the sanction of the Queen's letter to be appropriated to the Church. He also stated the error into which the Lord Bishop had fallen with respect to there being no member of the Church of England on the Committee; although he believes, entirely by accident, that was the case in the commission, which had performed its arduous duties in such a manner as to give general satisfaction.—P. 59.

Before the Committee leave this part of the subject, they cannot refrain from remarking upon the exceeding zeal and assiduity with which the applications for so large a portion as one-half (say £15,758 stg.) of the collections under the Queen's letter have been followed up, and to express their regret that these repeated appeals should finally have been successful; a regret in which they think the subscribers to the relief fund, as well as the whole British public, would readily participate.

Adverting to the first of the despatches under the head of general correspondence—that of His Excellency Sir John Harvey to the then Secretary of State—there is this significant passage:—"Much as the hopes of the mercantile and the sufferings of the labouring classes claim our sympathies, yet should our deepest commiseration rest upon the *middle classes*, who, accustomed to comparative ease and comfort, find themselves and their helpless families suddenly reduced to a state of the most absolute destitution."—P. 6.

In the despatch No. 1 from Earl Grey to Sir John Harvey, 18th July, the first intimation is given of the extension of the Government aid to the sum of £30,000; and in that despatch, his Lordship observes—"It is scarcely necessary for me to express my conviction, that you will make every arrangement which may be expedient and effectual for ensuring the *due application* of this money to the service of the persons who have been rendered destitute by this calamitous event."—P. 24.

And in the memorandum of Sir John Harvey for the Chairman of the General Relief Committee, and also to serve as instructions for the pecuniary Relief Commissioners, Sir John Harvey observes that both from the letter and spirit as well of the despatch of the Right Honourable the Secretary of State announcing the magnificent donation of £30,000, by which he is required to take effectual means for securing its due application to the service of the persons who have been rendered destitute by the late calamitous fire, as those from the Governor-General and the Lieutenant-Governors of the neighbouring colonies, it is sufficiently apparent that the contemplated relief is to be sought, not among the higher and more wealthy sufferers, but among those who have been reduced to severe distress or entire destitution. And the reason for this is stated, that in aid of such of the former class as may need it, application had been made to her Majesty's government for a loan to the colony to such an amount as may enable the local government to purchase, secured upon the property itself, in aid of the reconstruction of houses, &c.—P. 45.

But it will be remembered, that her Majesty's government refused to accede to the application for the loan spoken of, and therefore the higher and more wealthy classes of sufferers were either not relieved at all or but in

very scanty measure. They waited patiently in the expectation that their losses would be entertained after the humbler, but scarcely more readily, had been disposed of, and thus in some instances were altogether deprived of any assistance, and in others, of anything but a fair proportion of that to which they were entitled. It is true that in his despatch of the 5th September the Administrator of the Government in detailing to Lord Grey the system by which the awards to each applicant was made up, Colonel Law stated that under that system the greatest amount of relief was afforded to No. 2 (that is, the middle class) in Earl Grey's classification; but this is only true in a certain sense, for if £50 then and £100 afterwards were the maximum allowed to any applicant however great his loss may have been, it is clear that the relief so extended could have but little effect in reducing heavy liabilities, in addition to actual loss in property of from £2,000 to £3,000 and upwards; whereas the sum of £5 or £10 to some of class No. 3 was a very large compensation.

Again, under this division of the subject the Committee would refer to Earl Grey's despatch to the officer administering the government, dated 3rd September, in which, dividing the sufferers into three classes, his Lordship says:—"The middle class, comprehending those engaged in the retail trade, shop-keepers and others, will, I have reason to think, furnish the largest number of applicants for assistance, and which will require both judgment and discrimination in the administration of it. In this class," his Lordship truly says, "the losses have been extensively and keenly felt;" and elsewhere his Lordship intimates that by relieving them, after the manner which his Lordship points out, means of employment would be provided for the labouring population.—P. 47.

But the fact is, that while the labouring and humbler classes have been provided for to a very ample extent, and in numerous instances placed in more comfortable circumstances than they were before the fire occurred—(as in Sir John Harvey's despatch to Earl Grey dated so far back as August last, he stated that distress among the labouring and mechanical classes had actually almost ceased, in consequence of the full demand for labour, and that the real sufferers were to be found among the middle and humbler classes—[Pp. 21, 22]—it is undeniable that the middle and some of the wealthier portion of the sufferers stand at this moment in need of all the funds remaining from the government and general contributions that can possibly be made available to them. They are aware that the main object of all the contributions was the relief of those who were reduced to needy circumstances in consequence of the fire; that no such object was originally contemplated as the re-construction of public buildings, or the erection of a magnificent edifice out of the funds so subscribed, or any part of them—that as respects the former of these it is but just that if the expense is to be borne by the Voluntary

the burthen of it should fall alike upon the whole of its inhabitants; and that as it respects the latter, that as the majority of them are not Episcopalians, it is not just that monies which were intended for the relief of their necessities, should be expended in the construction of a splendid edifice for the public worship of God, when a building in every way adequate for the purpose may be erected for a reasonable sum—and towards which they would have acquiesced in the appropriation of £5000 or even £6000.

That upon a review of all the circumstances—if it should be found that the decision of the government as to the appropriation of one half of the amount raised under the Queen's letter is irrevocable, then they are of opinion that a memorial to her Majesty's government may, with great justice and propriety, be made, the prayer of which should be that her most gracious Majesty may be pleased to direct the immediate distribution of the remaining funds at the disposal of the government, with especial reference to that class of the sufferers which has either not been considered at all, or to whom the award given has fallen far short of relieving them from their pressing necessities. In this view of the matter the Committee feel themselves fortified by the concurrently expressed opinions of the noble Earl at the head of the Colonial Department, and his Excellency Sir John Harvey, the late head of the Executive here.

MEMORIAL

TO THE RIGHT HON. EARL GREY, HER MAJESTY'S
PRINCIPAL SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES.

*The Memorial of the Committee at St. John's, Newfoundland,
for the distribution of the Funds raised for the relief of
the sufferers by the fire which laid waste the principal
part of the Town on the 9th June, 1846,*

HUMBLY SHEWETH—

That your Memorialists have learnt with deep concern that your Lordship has acceded to a recommendation from the Executive Government here that a considerable portion of the monies granted by the Imperial Parliament and by the Local Governments of our neighbouring Colonies, as well as what was collected in England under the sanction of the Queen's letter, shall be expended in the erection of public buildings in this town, and your Memorialists feel assured, from the tenor of your Lordship's communication of the 3rd September last, to the Administrator of the Government here, that your Lordship would never have sanctioned such an appropriation had your Lordship been made acquainted with the real condition of a great number of the sufferers by whom the loss has been, and still continues to be, felt most severely.

Your Memorialists lament exceedingly their not having been made acquainted with the views your Lordship entertained and expressed in the communication above referred to—views in every way consonant with those of your Memorialists; and the valuable suggestions offered by your Lordship would, doubtless, have been acted upon had your Memorialists been aware of them at the time; but it was not until it appeared in the public prints here some ten days or a fortnight since, that your Memorialists had the slightest information upon the subject.

Your Memorialists have carefully reviewed the correspondence and documents having reference to the sufferers by the fire here, published by order of the House of Lords, and they most respectfully solicit your Lordship's perusal of their report upon the same, feeling assured that your Lordship will approve of the sentiments therein set forth; and they therefore pray that your Lordship will be pleased to cause the benevolent intentions of Her Majesty's Government and those who subscribed to the relief fund, to be carried into effect by directing the monies to be applied for relief of the sufferers instead of to the erection of public buildings. And, as in duty bound, your Memorialists will ever pray.

(On behalf of the Committee),

ROBERT PROWSE, *Chairman.*

St. John's, Newfoundland, August 2nd, 1847.