

## **To the Earl of Elgin, Governor General of British North America, 1847**

May It Please Your Excellency,

We the inhabitants of the city of Toronto, in public meeting assembled respectfully invite the attention of your Excellency to the consideration of a subject, the urgency and importance of which will warrant our pressing it most earnestly on your Excellency's earliest notice.

During the past season the city of Toronto, in common with several other parts of Canada, has been the recipient of a very large body of emigrants from the British Isles, landed on our shores in a state, beyond all description, of lamentable and almost hopeless destitutions, and bearing with them a pestilence of the most virulent and destructive character.

Out of the 100 000 emigrants landed in Quebec, nearly 40 000 were forwarded to this city; and from the month of June to the present time, the city has exhibited an amount of pauperism, suffering and disease unparalleled in her annals, and tolerable only from the belief of its having been utterly unforeseen, and from a trust in the mercy of Providence that it will not be suffered again to occur.

During the same period the hospitals appropriated to the suffering emigrants have, including the sick and convalescent divisions, been generally filled to overflowing with a number of patients often nearly reaching 1000 souls.

In addition to this mass of sickness and wretchedness, the number of persons, men, women, and children, begging from street to street for relief has been fearfully on the increase; and a large mendicant population, once unknown to our Canadian towns, has rapidly sprung into existence.

Your Excellency must be already familiar with the terrible statistics of death, sorrow, and destitution on the reckless and unguided emigration of 1847. Our object at the present is not to dwell upon the past, further than may be necessary to suggest such a different course for the future, as may save us from a possible repetition of horrors which, if they can be or could have averted by human precautions, would reflect deep and lasting disgrace on those who neglect the means of preventing or alleviation.

If the wide-spread suffering of the past year were dispensation from the chastening hand of Providence, unaffected and uncaused by human agency, the city of Toronto would willingly or at least silently bear their portion of the general loss and misery.

Sincerely believing it to have arisen in a very serious degree from neglect, indifference, and mismanagement, we respectfully venture to press on your Excellency the absolute necessity that exists for the adoption of prompt remedial measures.

The dreadful sufferings from want of wholesome food, ventilation room, and decent clothing on board the emigrant vessels – the startling fact of many thousands having found a grave in the ocean, that they thought was to bear them to a land of peace and plenty – the apparently total disregard of any inspection of the vessels, at the British ports – the neglect of salutary regulations as to the number of passengers proportioned to the size of the vessels, or the providing of a sufficient supply of food – the manner in which the healthy and the sick were shipped up the river and the lakes, and the catalogue of deaths at the numerous hospitals from Grosse Isle to Sandwich – all these are now matters of history, and are, doubtless, fresh in your Excellency's recollection.

We now most earnestly request your Excellency, without waiting for any action on the part of the Provincial Legislature, to aid the inhabitants of Canada in procuring from Her Majesty's Home Government such a vigorous interposition in the conduct of the anticipated emigration of 1848 as may ensure, so far as human precautions may extend, the nonrecurrence of the melancholy and revolting sufferings of the past season. A watchful and complete system of inspection of every emigrant vessel previous to its being allowed to leave port – due attention to the clothing and provisions of the passenger – strict rules as to the number allowed to be carried – all these can avail much to diminish the risk of pestilence. Above all, the fact cannot be too widely promulgated in Great Britain and Ireland, that the throwing of a half-clad and penniless emigrant on the shores of the St. Lawrence, may be the means of ridding an estate of a burdensome tenant; but it is an almost hopeless method of providing for a fellow-Christian.

This city has already lost some of her best and most valued citizens by the malignant fever introduced by the emigrants last season. Universal alarm has pervaded the community, and considerable interruption to business and travel has been caused by the general state of the great thoroughfares of the province, from the prevalence of disease.

Most respectfully, but firmly, do the citizens of Toronto protest, through your Excellency, against their hitherto and prosperous country being made the receptacle for the cast-off pauperism and disease of another hemisphere. To those already among us, without reference to national origin or other distinction, we trust we shall ever be ready to extend a helping hand and an active charity; but we look upon it as unjust and intolerable that the neglect and misconduct of others are to be the means of impoverishing and infecting our young country.

A well regulated emigration from the British Isles will confer inestimable advantages on the North American provinces, and on this city and its environs in particular. An emigration, such as has made memorable the season of 1847, must ever prove the opposite of a blessing to all concerned in it.

We feel persuaded that her Majesty's Government will take such necessary precautions as to relieve the province at large, and its municipalities in particular, from the most painful, but most imperative duty of adopting such stringent measures as the exigency of the crises may require for their own preservation.

Again most earnestly and respectfully entreating your Excellency's earliest attention to this all-important subject, we beg to renew to your Excellency our assurance of respect for your Excellency's person and government.