

The Irish Emigration of 1847 and Its Canadian Consequences

BY THE REV. JOHN A. GALLAGHER, C.S.S.R.
St. Alphonsus Seminary, Woodstock, Ont.

The Irish Emigration of 1847 is without a parallel in History. In its causes, numbers and tragic circumstances this flight of a people whose passionate love of Country is traditional and unique, is unprecedented in the records of Nations. Historians have called this Emigration the Exodus of the Irish, The Irish Hegira — phrases that suggest forced flight in large numbers. The Irish themselves have written this year down as "Black Forty-Seven"—a year black with Famine, Disease, Death and Exile from the land of their birth. In tracing the causality of conditions in Ireland at this period that brought on such a National Calamity, one fact strikes the student—the frequency of famine in the 18th and 19th centuries. Famines previous to this year were partial. Their causes were evident—the ordinary Visitations of Nature or destruction of crops brought about by an enemy as a measure of war. But, as D'Alton¹ says in his History of Ireland, "In no case did the Calamity arise from the sudden and unexpected failure of a crop on which the people mainly relied." Why? Because we find a variety of agricultural products grown and used by the Nation as food. Toward the end of the 16th Century Sir Walter Raleigh had introduced the potato from Virginia, and it is highly debatable whether Raleigh conferred a blessing or brought a curse to the Irish. The potato did not at first find favor with the peasant. O'Rorke² says it was not sown extensively in the 17th century and even in the first quarter of the 18th century. Corn continued to supply food to the nation. Then came economic and social change in Ireland — effects of eviction and famine. We come to the small-holding and Patch-of-land Era in Ireland. Absentee Landlordism with its unjust land laws that pauperized the peasant is responsible for much of the misery of the 18th and 19th century Ireland.³ A system that took all from and gave nothing to the peasant led indirectly to the famine of '47 and its consequent wholesale emigration. The rent must be paid, though starvation and death be the result. That rent paid in produce or corn never circulated in Ireland. The produce was shipped to a foreign market and the money spent in England or on the Continent. Ireland was drained of money and food. Into what position was the poor peasant forced? Nationally the Irish peasant's condition was as follows: Following the Catholic Relief Act of 1793, which gave a minimum of rights, small freeholds, increased enormously. They were just patches of land. What did these

¹ D'Alton *History of Ireland*, Vol. V, page 190.

² O'Rorke, *History of the Great Irish Famine*, pp. 8-10.

³ S. Walpole, *History of England*, 2d ed., Vol. V, p. 89.

small land tenants grow. Mainly the potato. With the exception of rice, the potato was the cheapest food for sustaining human life. Eight people could be fed for one year on the produce of one Irish acre, whereas it would take two acres of corn. Again, corn was subject to tithes and the potato was exempt. Thus we see why the potato was grown nationally. It was the poor Irishman's food, together with milk, for practically the entire year. Did he grow anything else on his few acres? Yes, corn, that is, wheat — but it was not for personal consumption. It paid the rent. T. P. O'Connor⁴ says "the landlord took from the tenant all the produce minus the potatoes necessary to keep them from famine". Thus we see the Irishman forced to depend on the potato. When in 1845 the blight came and half the potato crop was ruined, consternation and fear filled every peasant. Meetings were held to demand Government remedies. O'Connell demanded that distilling be stopped; that exports of all provisions from Ireland be prohibited; that public granaries be set up. These were measures that would have helped Ireland. Followed a policy of delay. A refusal to offend the Protectionists by throwing open the Irish ports! The peasant became the victim of Political Economy. The spring of 1846 came upon Ireland. To recuperate from last year's famine crop the peasant put forth every effort. He made every sacrifice. He sold stock and corn, bed-clothes and Sunday dress and other cheap finery which had graced Church service and christening. All were pawned. All sacrificed to obtain seed potatoes. Thus their pitiful self-denial ensured their total ruin. All went well with the potato crop till the beginning of August. A dry fog, whitish and yellowish, emitting a disagreeable odor, was seen to rise from the ground. Justin McCarthy remembers seeing it in Bantry Bay, Cork. It was seen in Sligo. In that fog was death and starvation. In a single night the entire potato crop was destroyed. The destruction was sudden, swift, and universal. We quote Father Matthew: "On the 27th of last month (July) I passed from Cork to Dublin and this doomed plant bloomed in all the luxuriance of an abundant harvest. Returning on the 3rd instant (August) I beheld with sorrow one wide waste of putrefying vegetation." The ruin of the peasant was complete. He had neither clothing, money, nor food. Ireland became a National Soup-Kitchen, though enough produce and cattle to feed the entire Nation was being shipped across the channel and to various foreign ports. National starvation soon gripped the land. The people died by the roadside with grass in their mouths. The cabins became family tombs. The horrible device of the hinged coffin that dropped the body in the grave and was brought back for further use was an invention of the time. People would stare stupidly at you without speaking. The living envied the dead. Lord Russell and Sir Robert Peel tried to help Ireland, but their remedies were inadequate or useless, as, for example, the Labor Rate Act and the Relief or Soup Kitchen Act. The tenant was now a burden on the Landlord. He could pay no rent — he had to be fed. He was a total liability. The problem was how to rid themselves of these impoverished small holders and consolidate their farms. A Colonel Wyndham ingeniously showed them the way. Colonel Wyndham was an Irish landlord, owning large estates in Clare and Limerick. He conceived the scheme of transferring some of the poor people on his

⁴ T. P. O'Connor, *The Parnell Movement*, p. 123.

estates in Clare and Limerick to Canada. As an experiment he sent two hundred to our shore. The experiment received wide advertisement at the time. Here was the solution of a century old problem—Transportation. Wyndham's plan was eagerly adopted by the Irish landlords. By bearing the initial expense of transportation they would economize in the end. The victim was approached. An offer dazzling to one who was destitute was made. He was offered three Pounds by some landlords to pay his passage to Canada. On his arrival there he was told that he would be met by an agent who would give him a further sum of ten to twenty shillings or more, according to the members in the family. This agent would place him and direct him in the new land. The landlords had no agents in Canada. Has History ever witnessed such exploitation of the helpless and indigent? Another feature of this deportation shocks us — it was selective. Mr. J. M. O'Leary, in his documented series of articles on Grosse Isle, says: "They took special care to rid their estates of the helpless widows and their little ones, of the old, the crippled, and those whose constitutions had been enfeebled by sickness and destitution." How did official England regard this forced emigration? An opportunity at last to settle the Irish Question.

THE FEVER FLEET

The manner of transporting the Irish emigrant of '47 fills a black page in the annals of the Sea. Anything that could float or hold a sail was used to carry the emigrant across the sea. Ruined as he was, with only a pittance granted for his passage by the landlord, he had to accept. He was literally herded into vessels never built or intended for passenger service. Most of the ships were timber ships used in the Canadian Lumber trade. They were sailing vessels described as "Old Tubs". They took six to eight weeks to cross the Atlantic and sometimes well nigh three months. Into the holds of these timber vessels the Irish were crowded. Where there was hardly room for one, three human beings were stalled. This was the general disproportion of every ship. The following description was given later by an immigrant who sailed in one of these vessels: "On each side of the vessel were two rows of bunks, one above the other. These were made of boards. Each bunk held two persons. They might properly be described as an upper and lower bunk running all around the ship. There was no light — no ventilation whatever, except what we got from two hatchways. Each immigrant was allowed by law thirty-three inches of room in width, but we didn't get it. Each ship was required to carry hard bread sufficient to give each passenger a pound a day. Had the bread been eatable it would have saved us but it was not."⁵ Lord Monteagle's nephew Stephen de Vere substantiates and amplifies the above account. He says, "The food is generally unselected and seldom sufficiently cooked. The supply of water, hardly enough for cooking and drinking, does not allow washing. The narrow space between the sleeping berths and piles of boxes is never washed or scraped."⁶ I dare not describe

⁵ Dean Harris, *The Catholic Church in the Niagara Peninsula*, p. 233.

⁶ M. J. O'Leary, "Grosse Isle" *Catholic Record*, London, Ont., April 9th, 1892.

further the disgusting condition of these ships wherein four hundred men, women and children were confined together without regard for sex, age or condition. Decency was a luxury and cleanliness of necessity neglected. Modesty made many sleep with their clothes on. Little wonder that the holds of these ships became hotbeds of disease. The foul pestilential air was the best conductor of germs. Before the ship was a day out at sea, the dread typhus or ship fever was raging in every vessel. Constitutions which were broken down and weakened by famine and its accompanying diseases became the easy prey of ship fever. Even the rugged and healthy soon fell victims to the unsanitary conditions. The captains of these ships were ignorant of the methods of handling passenger vessels. They did not even use elementary sanitation, such as cleansing the holds, and allowing the fresh air to circulate through the ship. Had even this been done, hundreds of lives would have been saved. Deaths soon became a daily occurrence. The sombre service of burial at sea became all too common. The sullen crew had to be compelled to commit these bodies to the sea. A sovereign a body overcame fear of the fever. Ireland was connected to Canada by a chain of dead bodies of her children — old man and infant, parent and child, found a grave in the Atlantic. Official figures taken from the Report of a committee of the Honourable the Executive Council on matters of State, give the astounding total of 5,293 deaths at sea.⁷ Dr. Douglas, the medical Superintendent of Grosse Isle, estimated that 8,000 died at sea in 1847. These figures alone are witness to the indescribable ship conditions of the emigration of '47. Little wonder these vessels were called floating coffins. The some four hundred vessels that emptied their human cargoes in Canada go down in Canadian History as the coming of the Fever Fleet. Their prows were turned towards Canada because of the stringent measures enforced by the American Government against landing indigent immigrants in the States. First, a humane law limiting the number of passengers each vessel could carry, thus raising the price of passage. Secondly, New York State and Massachusetts put laws into effect which held the master or owner of a ship responsible for a period of two years for all emigrants lest they become a public charge, and this was ensured by the demanding of bonds from the ship-owners or masters of the vessel. The natural result of these laws was to turn away the tide of emigration from the United States to Canada — the colony where no sane immigration laws protected our people. We justly blame the Home Government for allowing such an enormous immigration of some one hundred thousand people to come to Canada in one year. We condemn the lack of supervision that allowed such disgraceful herding of human beings in unfit vessels that brought death and disease to our country from St. John, N.B., to the Great Lakes. An English Peer justly said: "Whoever threw these poor people under the rock of Quebec without means of subsistence is guilty of murder."

GROSSE ISLE

⁷ Public Archives of Canada, State Book H, p. 35. (Minutes of 8 December, 1847.)

Grosse Isle is situated some 30 miles east of the historic city of Quebec. It measures three miles long by about a mile wide. In 1832 the Imperial Authorities took possession of the Island for the purpose of quarantine, as it was directly in the path of incoming vessels. At this island on the 14th of May, 1847, the *Syria* from Liverpool dropped anchor with 241 passengers recently from Ireland. (Father Bernard O'Reilly says the *Urania* from Cork, on May 8th, was the first ship to arrive.) On the 28th of May thirty vessels were anchored off Grosse Isle. Up to the first week in June 84 ships had landed. All told 442 ships carrying immigrants anchored off Grosse Isle in 1847. Of these 36 ships came from German ports, the remainder from the British Isles. Of these, 140 vessels sailed from England, mostly from the port of Liverpool, bringing 32,328 emigrants, twenty some thousand of whom were Irish; 221 vessels from Ireland, with 54,329 passengers; 42 ships from Scotland, with 3,752 on board. Total, 89,738 from British ports, of whom some 75,000 were Irish. These figures are official. Father O'Reilly, later Monseigneur O'Reilly, who labored night and day among the fever stricken, says that every single vessel of the eighty-four that arrived up to the first week in June literally "reeked with pestilence." Practically every ship from the *Uranus* and *Syria* of May to the *Richard Watson* from Sligo, which arrived Nov. 7th, carried a cargo of death and disease. Was Canada prepared to receive this multitude of sick and dying? In a half measure, yes. The few sheds of the cholera era were hastily refitted with 50 bedsteads and double the amount of straw used in the other seasons. Another shed containing 60 beds was erected in May on the earnest request of Dr. Douglas, the medical superintendent of Grosse Isle, and Mr. A. C. Buchanan, the chief Emigrant agent of Lower Canada. All told, provision was made for only 200 at most and this proved only too soon to be pitifully inadequate.⁸

Though we cannot blame the Canadian Government for this deluge of typhus-stricken emigrants that came upon our shores, we can strongly criticise the official short-sightedness and policy of delay and half-measures that cost thousand of lives at Grosse Isle, Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston, Toronto and other parts of Upper Canada. True, the Government was taken by surprise by the amount of immigration, the numbers of typhus-stricken, and the virulence of the disease, but they had received a warning. In the preparation of this paper I used a series of letters from the Dominion Government Archives; State Book F. They form the correspondence that was carried on between Mr. A. C. Buchanan, chief emigrant agent of Lower Canada, and Dr. G. M. Douglas, chief medical superintendent of Grosse Isle, and the Executive Council in Montreal. The letters from these two officials, from February to November, are an official history of the Immigration and the dread typhus of '47. In a letter dated March 8th, Dr. Douglas calls the attention of the Government to the necessity of organizing the Quarantine establishment at Grosse Isle. A letter of March 24th asks for money for improvements. There follows a letter reporting tenders for steamship services between Grosse Isle and Quebec, and the acceptance of the steamer *St. George* at £449 per season. May 27th: letters approving appointment of two more medical assistants. May 24th: an

⁸ J. J. Heagerty, *Four Centuries of Medical History in Canada*.

additional trip a week to Quebec recommended. The letters of June 1st recommended that the healthy passengers spend ten days quarantine on shore or 15 days quarantine on board. This measure, which entailed loss of life through contagion, was adopted. The healthy should have been immediately removed from the fetid atmosphere of the ships and disease-laden air of the Island and transferred further down the river. As a result one in every three took the fever. Of the 90,000 immigrants who landed at Grosse Isle 30,000 were admitted to the hospital of Canada as fever patients. Segregation of the healthy from the sick was a measure at first neglected, then finally adopted when too late. June 18th finds a letter approving the building of additional sheds. June 15th dates a letter from the Mayor of Quebec protesting in the name of the citizens of St. Roch and of the city generally the erection of sheds near the Marine Hospital and suggesting these sheds be erected at Point Levis. The Government, however, rejected Point Levis as a hospital site, as it would be necessary to remove the kitchen apparatus, stores and medicines. Many sick emigrants were brought to Quebec, where 1,041 succumbed to the disease, including many of the inhabitants. Failure to heed warnings, to grasp the gravity of the situation, and to adopt adequate measures to stem the typhus mortality, are charges justly levelled against the Council. Mr. Robert Christie, a member of Parliament, in a letter dated Quebec, May 31st, calls the attention of the Government to the necessity of making a greater outlay of money in the present emergency. He protests the conduct and insufficiency of the police force on the Island and vehemently insists that the duties of the medical superintendent and medical boarding officer be divided and not invested in one and the same officer. He finally demands that the Island be placed under military custody. Father Bernard O'Reilly, later Mons. O'Reilly, S.J., of New York, in a letter dated July 11th, Quarantine Station, defending the name of Dr. Douglas, the medical superintendent of Grosse Isle, who was made to bear unjustly the blame that should have fallen on official short-sightedness, gives a graphic description of the horrible scenes on Grosse Isle. People dying with fever and dysentery, without food, drink or bedding — lying on boards without a pillow under their head. "No Government boat has come here since Tuesday." (He writes on Saturday following.) He continues: "The medical attention is insufficient and those imperilling their lives receive a paltry seventeen shillings a day. The consequence is that every day my reverend fellow laborers and devoted medical gentlemen who imperil their lives in the same cause are compelled to behold hundreds that a little providential precaution and ordinary care might have restored to their large, helpless, helpless families and distracted relations, hurried away in a few hours to their premature and unhonoured graves; while those who should have at once proved their salvation at every cost and sacrifice are higgling about the means." This from a priest who risked his life among the stricken of the Island. As a result Grosse Isle became a charnel house.

How did Canada receive these immigrants? Naturally, and justly, a storm of protest arose from the Canadas, from the British North American Provinces. Widespread indignation was expressed at the callous indifference of the Imperial Government allowing this Irish Immigration to continue without trying in any way to prevent its attendant evils. The Immigration department was controlled by the Imperial Government

at this time. A great burden and heavy financial drain was placed upon Canada at a time when money was scarce and trade paralyzed by the action of the Imperial Government itself. On the 25th of June official protest was made by the Canadian Parliament. Lord Elgin pointed out to Earl Grey, the Colonial Secretary, "the severe strain" placed on the loyalty of the people by the culpable negligence of the Home Government. "All things considered a great deal of forbearance has been shown by the colonists under this trial." Elgin unmistakably stressed the fact that "Great Britain must make good to the provinces the expenses entailed on it by this visitation." The Imperial Government did make good the following year. It is a significant fact that Earl Grey did not answer Lord Elgin's letters of protest till the 1st of December of that year, when the season of immigration had closed.⁹ We can readily see that the horrors of '47 partially resulted from an Imperial immigration policy. The Archbishop of Quebec, then Joseph Signai, wrote a letter on June 9th, not of protest but of exhortation, to the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland, warning them of the "dismal fate" that awaited the unfortunate children of Ireland who seek relief in Canada. He depicts the conditions of Grosse Isle and concludes hoping their Lordships "will open the eyes of their subjects to their true interests and prevent the honest religious Irish peasantry from being the victims of speculation."¹⁰ This letter was not an attempt by Monseigneur Signai to avoid a fearful burden but to prevent further exploitation of a deceived people.

The reception of the Irish immigrant in Lower Canada was generous. Money, food, clothing and supplies were cheerfully given. And more, they took the poor orphans, of whom there were approximately some 1,500 in Lower Canada, to their breasts. Some were placed in St. Brigid's Asylum—the humble beginning of the present beautiful St. Bridgid's Home. Irish Catholic families adopted many others. For our French brethren the grateful Irish heart will ever beat for their kindly unstinted charity in adopting these homeless children. Maguire in his *Irish in America* pays grateful tribute to Father Cazeau, Secretary of the Archbishop, who was called Father of the Irish.¹¹ Through his powerful influence many orphans were placed in good homes. Through Mgr. Baillargeon, Bishop of Quebec, then *curé* of the city, 200 children were placed on one Sunday afternoon. In all 600 orphans found homes with hospitable French-Canadian families.

HEROISM OF PRIEST AND NUN

We have no brighter example of courageous self-sacrifice and devotion to duty than that given by our Canadian priesthood and sisterhood during this awful typhus period. Forty-four French and English priests tended the victims at Grosse Isle. Nineteen contracted the fever, and five paid the supreme sacrifice of devotion to souls — the Reverend Fathers Hubert Robson, Montminy, Hugh Paisley, F. S. Bardy and Pierre Roy.

⁹ Public Archives of Canada: Series G, Vol. 129, p. 394. (Grey to Elgin, No. 142.)

¹⁰ Letter of Bishop Signai — Eccles. Archives of Quebec. Maguire.

¹¹ *The Irish in America*, p. 139.

Among the nineteen who contracted the fever while tending the fever-stricken were Father Taschereau, later Cardinal Taschereau, first Prince of the Church in Quebec, and Father Horan, later Bishop of Kingston. Two other priests were J. B. Ferland, the Historian, and Father Bernard O'Reilly, later Protonotary Apostolic. The celebrated Father McMahan, Pastor of St. Patrick's Church, is a name that stands out at this time for tireless activity and self-sacrifice in aid of his stricken countrymen. Mr. Jordan in his "Grosse Isle Tragedy" says that every Sunday found Father McMahan in the pulpit seeking relief for the sufferers.¹² The Protestant clergy, especially those of the Church of England, nobly responded to the call of duty. Led by their Bishop Mountain of Quebec, seventeen of the clergy tended their brethren, who numbered about one-tenth of the total emigration. Of these seven contracted the disease and two died — the Rev. Richard Anderson and the Rev. Charles J. Morris.

MONTREAL

Montreal is but a counterpart of Grosse Isle; in fact, a common description can be applied to every fever shed from St. John, N.B., to Toronto. Mr. J. M. O'Leary, who made a deep study of Grosse Isle, says in his series of articles that he received a letter from Mr. John Wilson who had charge of the steamboat running between Grosse Isle and Montreal. Mr. Wilson wrote that he was the principal agent in forwarding some 80,000 Irish Immigrants from Grosse Isle to Point St. Charles, Montreal. Three large steamers, the *Quebec*, the *Queen* and the *Alliance* were used. He continued that the steamers carried 1,000 to 1,400 immigrants. At Point St. Charles no suitable preparations were made to receive the emigrants. He stated that the number of deaths occurring there was a disgrace to the government. Again we see the criminal herding of human beings together with little or no regard to sanitation and the dangers of contagion. In the State Book F of the Public Archives of Canada we have more letter-writing to the Executive Council, humbly advising His Excellency of certain arrangements to be made, and sheds to be built. All these letters spelled delay and meanwhile the Typhus reached epidemic proportions in Montreal. The Government first erected three sheds 150 feet long by 40 to 50 feet wide. As thousands of sick immigrants landed at Windmill point in Point St. Charles soon eleven sheds had to be erected. The mortality here along the riverbank of Point St. Charles was appalling. Today near Victoria Bridge one can see the large "Boulder Stone", as it was called in Montreal, standing on a square stone Base. On its rough surface are inscribed the words "To preserve from desecration the remains of 6,000 immigrants who died of ship fever A.D. 1847-1848 this stone is erected by the Workmen of Messrs. Peto, Brassey and Betts, employed in the construction of the Victoria Bridge A.D. 1859". Midst a network of railroad tracks today it is the only sign that this ground is an Irish Cemetery. Official figures of the Executive Council say 3,579 died in Montreal of Typhus. There is quite a discrepancy between these figures and those of the Monument.

¹² J. A. Jordan, *The Grosse Isle Tragedy*, p. 59.

The heroism of the Catholic Priesthood of Montreal was again shown by their self-sacrifice and tireless administration to the sick. In the face of spiritual need, no matter what the danger to himself, the priest's life is not his own.¹³ The Annals of the Hotel Dieu mention eight priests, including the Vicar General himself, M. H. Hudon, who lost their lives tending the fever victims. Five of these priests were Sulpicians. Father McNerney, curate of Lachine, died at Montreal. The Rev. Patrick Colgan died at St. Andrews. Bishop Bourget himself was stricken down with the fever. It was said that the Bishop and his Vicar General alternated in the night watches over the sick and dying. Father Charbonnel, later Bishop of Toronto, also fell a prey to the disease. After a long illness both Bishop Bourget and Father Charbonnel fortunately recovered. An editorial of July 10th pays the following tribute: "There never surely was any Church which in the times of the most fiery persecution proved at the sacrifice of comfort and life its devotion to religion, more signally that does now the Roman Catholic Clergy of Montreal". Many of the French priests labored under a language difficulty with the Irish Immigrant. Father Du Ranquet, S.J., who spent himself in his ministrations to the stricken at all hours of the day and night, asked his rector to obtain two men from Fordham University, N.Y. The Rector asked and two priests, Father du Merle and Michael Driscoll were sent to Montreal. The magnificent courage of Montreal's Sisterhoods during these trying times wrote a bright page in their Annals. No less than 17 Sisters belonging to the three Hospital Communities of Montreal died martyrs to duty tending the sick. The celebrated Mère McMullen, who was Superior-General of the Grey Nuns at that time, sent 23 other sisters to the Sheds on June 17th: of those who took sick 15 were anointed and 7 died.¹⁴ When we realize that 11,000 were sick in Montreal during the heat of this sultry summer of '47 we can readily see that the constant nursing required by so many patients weakened these brave sisters. In the *Pilot* of July 8th it is stated: "There are at the present moment 48 nuns sick from exposure, fatigue and the attacks of the disease." It was Divine protection surely that all did not die.

UPPER CANADA

In treating of the Emigration of '47 and its accompanying typhus epidemic in Upper Canada I used photostat copies of the letters written to the Executive Council in Montreal by various officials. These letters are from State Book G in the Dominion Archives. The entire series of letters strike a similar note — alarm at the arrival of so many indigent immigrants in various stages of typhus fever: permission requested to form Boards of Health: to erect hospital sheds: to increase medical staffs; to hire more help in the hospitals. Some of the letters are statements and hospital reports of those admitted, discharged, convalescent and dead. Invariably, sometimes delicately, sometimes bluntly, the Executive Council is reminded that this town or village, as the

¹³ Extracts from Hotel Dieu Annals, Vol. III.

¹⁴ Annals of the Grey Nuns, 1847.

case may be, cannot bear the financial burden and bills of expense attached or included in the reports. No less than 26 Boards of Health were erected in Upper Canada during this fever period of '47. We cannot treat individually of these localities in a paper limited in time and length. I will treat of Bytown, Kingston and Toronto as being most affected.

BYTOWN

The fever made its appearance in Ottawa in the early days of June. The first patients were placed with the Sisters, but so rapidly did the typhus spread, sheds had to be erected. On July 17th a letter was sent by the Board of Health to the Governor General requesting an increase of medical attendance upon the sick, advising that Drs. Hill and Barru confine their attention to the sheds and Dr. Vanbat remain at the Hospital. Père Alexis, in his *Histoire Ecclésiastique d'Ottawa*, quotes a letter of Mgr. Guigues to a daily paper in which he says over 1,000 were attacked by the fever and 200 died. The Oblate Fathers and the Grey Nuns were the heroes and heroines of plague-stricken Bytown. Fathers Molloy and Baudrand taking the fever, the Bishop of Montreal hastened to ordain two young Oblates, Fathers Ryan and FitzHenry, who, going to Bytown with Père Lagier, labored incessantly until the end of the plague.

KINGSTON

Kingston surprises us with the size and virulence of its fever epidemic and consequent deaths. We may find the reason in a letter written by Mr. John Wilson, who had charge of transporting the immigrants from Grosse Isle, to Mr. J.M. O'Leary. In brief he blames the Government for transporting so many immigrants from Grosse Isle directly to Kingston without stopping at Montreal to change or clean boats. The passage through the Canals was slow. Confined together for over two days, many healthy caught the disease. The number admitted into the hospitals at Kingston was 4,326. A monument erected to the fever victims in Kingston claims 1,400 succumbed to the typhus. Mr. Kirkpatrick's letters of this year are full, informative, and very interesting.¹⁵ His emigrant relief reports and Bills of Expense are clear, itemized, and revealing of conditions. His letter and Report of June 27th, 1847, show that 5,370 adults and 2,043 children — a total of 7,413 — received public relief from the 1st of June to the 25th, inclusive. His report for July 2nd to July 9th showed 4,744 indigents relieved. In his letter of Aug. 7th he sums up remarkably the reasons of the disease, spread and mortality in Kingston and recommends strongly "Garden Island", one and three-quarter miles directly south of Kingston, as the safest place for Hospital sheds. His demand is insistent that moneys be forthcoming to help the indigents. Mr. Kirkparick was an energetic Mayor, ably assisted by Mr. Robert Anglin and Mr. William Ford, who later became Mayor of Kingston. Their constant personal care encouraged their fellow

¹⁵ Public Archives of Canada: Proceedings in Council, 1847.

inhabitants, many of whom had fled the city. The Hotel Dieu Sisters, who had come to Kingston and founded a house in 1845, nursed the sick. Several took the fever and one, Sister Magorian — a Novice of six months — died.¹⁶ Three priests ministered ceaselessly to the sick and dying. On Father Dollard fell the major part of the work. Father Nealon, who had just recently been ordained, took the fever and died. We have letters,¹⁷ dated October 11th and 16th, of the chief emigrant agent, A. B. Hawke, and Vicar General MacDonnell of the Kingston Diocese, asking that the Catholic Orphans, of whom there were 118, be placed in the new wing of the Hotel Dieu; that \$250 be given outright to furnish the wing; and that about \$3.50 a month per head be granted for the upkeep of these orphans.

TORONTO

As early as May 18th, 1847, we come across a letter from the Mayor of Toronto to the Executive Council asking what steps should be taken to relieve the indigence of such immigrants as may enter this port. The letter also politely intimated that the city of Toronto should not bear the expenses but the Provincial Government. Toronto's Mayor had foresight. We see this borne out in the series of letters of the Mayor and Board of Health in the following months. The fact that the emigrant mortality in Toronto was lower than Kingston showed proper handling of the situation. On the 12th of June the Board of Health and the Trustees of the Toronto General Hospital met to adopt means of caring for the typhus immigrants who were now coming into the city. The Trustees of the General Hospital offered to transfer the ordinary patients to a building called Temple Chambers which they rented from a Mr. Bolton. At a meeting called June 19th the Board drew up a code of sanitary regulations. They were very sane. That all immigrants be landed at the wharf called Dr. Rees' wharf and there only, under penalty of law. Only those immigrants who had friends or connections in Toronto or neighborhood could remain in the city, the others to be forwarded as soon as possible to their destination. All others found in the city to be forthwith arrested as public charges. Medical officers must visit and inspect incoming steamers and also the sheds. Cleanliness was stressed. A meeting of June 24th recommended two sheds to be built on grounds of the General Hospital. These sheds were to measure 75 x 20 feet. On the fifth of July the Mayor of Toronto demanded from the Executive Council £1,000 for expenses already incurred. A letter of 12th of July from the Board of Health to Hon. D. Daly, Secretary, at Montreal, states that if patients increase at the present ratio three new sheds a week will have to be erected. He concludes by saying that his two letters of June 28th and July 5th remain unanswered.¹⁸ Further communications from official Toronto from July to November are replicas of the above. The letters of September and October are insistent that reimbursements be made to the city for expenses incurred in

¹⁶ Annals of the Hotel Dieu., Vol. III.

¹⁷ Public Archives of Canada: Proceedings in Council.

¹⁸ Letters of Board of Health from State Book G.

behalf of the Immigrants. 863 died in Toronto during the typhus epidemic. Father Kelly¹⁹ gives us a list of priests who ministered to the sick: Archdeacon Hay, Fathers Kirwin and O'Reilly (the latter came to Toronto from Dundas and worked in the sheds for 14 weeks tending as many as 45 patients a day), Father Carroll, Father Proulx from the North, Father Saenderl, C.S.S.R., from Waterloo, Father Schneider from Goderich and Father Quinlan from Brantford. These priests, fortunately, did not lose their lives during their constant ministrations. The shepherd himself, however, was struck down.²⁰ During September a midnight call came from the fever sheds that a poor woman was dying. Bishop Power answered the call and anointed the woman. The next day symptoms of the disease became evident in His Grace and on the first of October he died. His funeral was memorable in Toronto. The *British Colonist*, the leading newspaper of the day, eulogized him in a beautiful tribute to his active charitable life and noble death.

OTHER TOWNS AND VILLAGES IN UPPER CANADA

A letter from Mayor Ferris of Hamilton informs the Governor General that the Council of Hamilton contemplates erecting a platform or gangway running into the water of Burlington Bay with a shed over it for use of immigrants. The Council also contemplates procuring a building to be used as a hospital and the erecting of sheds in case of sick immigrants arriving. A lengthy letter from Brantford, dated the 9th of July, asks assistance for the large number of indigent immigrants arriving in the town. Letters from Cornwall, Williamsburg, River Trent, Prescott, Picton, asking Government aid and telling of measures adopted to meet the inrush of Immigration and to care for the sick, trace the progress of the Immigration from Montreal to Toronto. Another series of letters from Orillia, Barrie, Newmarket, Oakville, Simcoe, Woodstock, St. Catharines, Queenstown, Niagara, all contain a common demand of government assistance and health protective measures for its citizens. As I said before, the letters from State Book F and State Book G regarding the immigration of 1847 trace the events of that year from Grosse Isle to Sarina. They are interesting, and informative of conditions in their localities and thus will have local interest. In a limited article I can only mention these towns as they are an indication of the extent of the Immigration and Typhus of 1847. The typhus mortality figures in other parts of Upper Canada outside Kingston and Toronto number about 1,000. Mr. M. J. O'Leary quotes official figures that would place the number around 2,000. 3,500 deaths in Upper Canada, all sources considered, would seem a proper estimate. This out of a total of 38,781 immigrants who passed through Montreal to Upper Canada. We can see from official figures that Upper Canada did not suffer as much as Lower Canada from the typhus epidemic. This naturally resulted from the fact that Lower Canada was the port of arrival and therefore bore the brunt of the attack. Upper Canada had more time to prepare for the reception of the immigrants and to adopt sanitary regulations, as the letters of the 26 Boards of Health in Upper Canada

¹⁹ The Rev. Edward Kelly, *The Story of St. Paul's Parish*.

²⁰ *Jubilee Volume. Archbishop Walsh - Diocese of Toronto*, chap. iv, p. 121.

to the Executive Council indicate. With the exception of Toronto and Kingston (which was the Grosse Isle of Upper Canada) the mortality is scattered. The death rate was greater by far in Montreal alone than in all Upper Canada.

SAINT JOHN, NEW BRUNSWICK

Though this paper treats of Canada in 1847, which precedes Confederation by twenty years, our work would be incomplete if we did not consider the Immigration of '47, with its invariable consequent disease and death, in St. John, New Brunswick.²¹ In the month of June 35 vessels carrying 5,800 passengers landed at Partridge Island, just outside the harbor of St. John. 15,000 arrived during the summer, 2,000 alone from Lord Palmerston's estate. The Legislature of New Brunswick voted £1,500 sterling to alleviate the distress and a further sum of £1,500 was collected for the same purpose in St. John. Similar scenes of misery and hunger, disease and death in the hastily erected sheds of Partridge Island, in the city of St. John, and Middle Island (whence the immigrants from Miramichi, N.B., were removed) make these places a counterpart of Grosse Isle and Point St. Charles. Of the 15,000 who sailed for St. John, 2,000 died: 800 died on the ships coming over; 600 died and were buried on Partridge Island and 595 died in the city poorhouse (making around 1,200 deaths in New Brunswick). Dr. James Patrick Collins, who was one of the three doctors in charge of the fever patients in St. John, died a martyr to his duty and was buried in old St. Peter's grounds, situated behind the present parochial school on Elm Street.

Total figures based on "the report of a committee of the honorable the Executive Council on matters of State 7th December 1847" give the following statistics: Total number of British Immigrants who embarked for Canada, 89,738 — 75,000 of whom were Irish; 5,238 died at sea, 10,037 on land; 30,265 were admitted to hospitals. Add to this the Emigration and deaths of New Brunswick, which gives us the totals for the year 1847. Total British emigration 104,738; died at sea, 6,093; on land, 11,047. Total deaths 17,140. These totals are one of several sets of official figures given. Semi-official estimates based on the computation of those who tended the fever patients, especially at Grosse Isle and Montreal, would place the mortality total between 20,000 and 22,000. The total expense involved is placed at £106,000. The report of the Executive for State affairs on December 7th, and Lord Elgin's report of March 17th, 1848, total the expenses for the Immigration of 1847 at 182,922. The Inspector General F. Hincks, writing on 27th of March, 1848, to W. Marshall, Esq., cashier of the Bank of England, places the amount at 1150,000. Considering the vast outlay of expense required and the official position of Mr. Hincks, who was in a position to be best informed, this is the most trustworthy estimate of the year.²²

Before concluding I pay tribute to the noble band of physicians who, regardless of personal safety, attended the fevered immigrants. "They set a striking example of

²¹ *Canada and its Provinces*, Vol. XIII, p. 205.

²² Public Archives of Canada: Series G Vol. 461, p. 198.

heroism, zeal and devotion to duty."²³ To those who died, to those whom the fever attacked, to those who risked their lives and health, we pay tribute in this article.

CONCLUSION

We have traced the Emigration from Ireland to the Great Lakes. From official documents we have seen its consequences in Canada—death, disease, paralysis of trade, and financial stress. On the other hand, the pages of our history are ennobled by examples of charity, heroism and unstinting self-sacrifice. The consequences of the Immigration of 1847 were trying to Canada for a few succeeding years, which were necessary to digest and settle the Immigration of this year, mostly Irish.²⁴ (3) Today there are 1,230,000 people of Irish descent in Canada, many of them descendants of the Immigrants of '47; 558,000 of this number are on the farms and in the rural villages of Canada. As a religious and law-abiding people they are a definite force for good in the Christian solidarity of Canada. Canada has been repaid fully by the loyal and generous patriotism of the children and grand-children of the Irish Immigrants of 1847.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Public Archives of Canada: Minutes of the Executive Council of Canada, 1846-1848: State Books G, F. H.

Proceedings in Council, 1846-1848. (These contain the documents referred to the Executive Council, with the reports thereon. They include many papers to be found also in the G and other series.)

Series G, vols. 123-132: Despatches from the Colonial Office to the Governor General, 1846-1848.

Series G, vol. 461: Letter Book of despatches from the Governor General to the Colonial Office.

This series also contains letters received by the Governor General from officials and others within the province, and the entry books of the replies thereto.

Sir J. G. Bourinot: *Lord Elgin* (Toronto: 1903). (*Makers of Canada Series*.)

Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty (eds.): *Canada and Its Provinces*. Vol. XIII (Toronto: 1913). (Section "New Brunswick", by **W. O. Raymond**.)

²³ Heagerty, *Four Centuries of Medical History in Canada*, p. 127.

²⁴ The Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *A Fact a day about Canada*, March, 1936.

- L. Le Jeune: *Dictionnaire général du Canada*, 2 vols. (Ottawa: [1931]).
- W. K. Atherton: *Montreal 1535-1914*, 3 vols. (Montreal, etc.: 1914).
- J. J. Heagerty: *Four Centuries of Medical History in Canada*, 2 vols. (Toronto: 1928).
- The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. VIII: "Irish in Canada", by E. J. Devine.
- "Grosse Isle" - Four articles by M. J. O'Leary in *The Catholic Record*, of London, Ont., beginning 9 April, 1892.
- J. A. Jordan: *The Grosse Isle Tragedy* (Quebec: 1909).
- Annals of the Hôtel Dieu, Montreal*. Vol. III.
- Memoirs of the Grey Nuns, 1847.
- Le Rev. P. Alexis: *Histoire de la Province Ecclésiastique d'Ottawa et de la Colonisation dans la Vallée de l'Ottawa*, 2 vols. (Ottawa: 1897).
- Jubilee Volume - Archbishop Walsh - Diocese of Toronto*.
- E. Kelly: *The Story of St. Paul's Parish, Toronto* (Toronto: [1923]).
- Dean Harris: *The Catholic Church in the Niagara Peninsula 1626-1895* (Toronto: 1895).
- Niagara Historical Society*: Publication No. 31.
- E. A. D'Alton: *History of Ireland*, Vol. V.
- J. Mitchell: *History of Ireland*.
- T. P. O'Connor: *The Parnell Movement*.
- J. F. Maguire: *The Irish in America* (New York, etc.: 1868).
- Dominion Bureau of Statistics: *A Fact a Day about Canada* - March, 1936