

THE GLEANER:

AND NORTHUMBERLAND, KENT, GLOUCESTER AND RESTIGOUCHE
COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL JOURNAL.

OLD SERIES]

Nec arancorum sane textus ideo melior, quia ex se fila gignit, nec noster vilior quia ex alienis libamus ut apes.

[COMPRISED 13 VOLUMES.]

NEW SERIES, VOL. VII.]

MIRAMICHI, TUESDAY EVENING, APRIL 3, 1849.]

NUMBER 23.]

Provincial Legislature.

EXTRACTS FROM THE JOURNALS

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY, March 7.

Report from Henry A. Hart, Esq., M. D., in reference to Lazaretto at Sheldrake Island, and persons afflicted with Leprosy at Miramichi.

This Document being read at the Clerk's Table, is as follows:—
LAZARETTO AT SHELDRAKE ISLAND, AND LEPROSY DISEASE.

Fredericton, June 19, 1848.

May it please Your Excellency, it becomes my duty to inform Your Excellency that in fulfilment of the Commission assigned me by the Government, I proceeded to Miramichi on Friday the 2d of June.

Aware of the difficulties connected with my position, I immediately requested the united assistance of both the parties, whose differences of opinion had furnished the occasion for my appointment.

On the following Monday I visited the Islands and the Lazaretto. Four members of the Committee of Sessions, Messrs. Hutchison, Fraser, Nesmith, and Alexander Davidson, and two members of the Board of Health, Hon. Joseph Conard and Dr. Key, went with me, and afforded me every facility in their power, towards the attainment of the object of my investigation.

Afterwards I proceeded to Neguac and Tracadie, accompanied by James Davidson Esq., who was recommended to me both by the Hon. Alexander Rankin and the Hon. Joseph Conard, and of whom it is enough to say that he fully justified the high encomiums bestowed upon him by those gentlemen.

On my way I called at the houses of a number of the Lepers, and conversed with them and their friends on the subject of the Lazaretto.

At Tracadie I was hospitably entertained by the Rev. Monsieur Le France, who also kindly introduced me to several of his principal Parishioners.

Thus after a diligent and laborious inquiry, I obtained the information I required, and I now respectfully submit to Your Excellency the conclusions at which I have arrived on the various points proposed for my examination.

First, then, I consider the joint existence of the Quarantine Station and the Leper Lazaretto on Sheldrake Island, totally inadmissible. With respect to the Emigrants, I think it would highly objectionable. The Leprosy is a loathsome disease, and the object of universal abhorrence. Whatever may be the judgment of Medical men, the general impression is, that it is contagious: and the Emigrants who come to this Country, would for the most part, participate in popular opinion. I readily admit, that even upon the supposition of its contagiousness, if reasonable precautions were adopted, they would not incur the slightest risk; yet I know it would be impossible to persuade them to agree with me upon this point. With few exceptions, they do not belong to that class of men who are likely to make scientific distinctions between contagion and infection, and contagiousness in a high and low degree. They would feel that they were forced into a most dangerous neighborhood, and would drag out the period of their captivity in a state of perpetual alarm. And ultimately perhaps, the news of this arrangement would reach to other countries and materially affect the tide of Emigration to the Port. With respect to the Lepers, it would be infinitely more objectionable. To them it would really be attended with danger. I know it has been proposed to erect a fence across the Island. But a fence, in order to be adapted for the purpose, would require to be high, and built of brick or stone, which would involve considerable expense.— Besides it would only extend to high water mark, and could consequently afford no security against communication between the parties. But there is another consideration with reference to this arrangement which I confess has great

weight with me. These unfortunate Lepers have done no wrong; they are laboring under a Providential visitation; they have been forced from their homes and their friends with rope and pistol, and imprisoned upon thirty two acres of land. This is now all their world; and yet the most of them can walk abroad and enjoy the benefit of air and exercise. Is there a man who would grudge them still a little portion of their little territory—who would circumscribe within yet narrower limits the boundaries of their island-home? When first I saw them, and witnessed their agitation, and heard their bitter execration of the project, I could not suppress my sentiments. I was constrained to say to the Magistrates and Members of the Board of Health who were with me, that with my consent the Quarantine Station should never be established beside the Lazaretto; that no consideration could induce me to sanction a measure so inconsistent with humanity. There is yet another objection which I think would, of itself, be perfectly sufficient. I allude to the Marshes on the north west part of the Island, among which the Quarantine buildings would necessarily be erected. From the appearance of the ground, I do not believe these Marshes could be effectually drained, and they would undoubtedly prove most prejudicial to health; forming, during the heat of Summer, hot-beds of malaria.

But if there were no Lazaretto on Sheldrake Island, I would consider it altogether ineligible, at present, for a Quarantine Station. If indeed a Medical Staff could be maintained upon it, the case would be widely different; but the uncertainty and irregularity connected with Emigration to the port of Miramichi, render this, by universal consent, absolutely impossible. Its distance from the residence of the nearest Physician is nine miles, and it is one mile from the shore; which circumstances, to my mind, constitute a fatal objection. Indeed my opinion upon this point is so strong, that I would deem it an act of Medical insanity to select it as a site for a Quarantine Hospital. The question is an important one, involving the health and lives perhaps of thousands. It would be impossible for a Physician at so great a distance, to do justice to his patients; they would be unavoidably neglected. There are few cases which require such close attention and care as those which generally abound upon the Quarantine Station. Typhus fever, small pox, and all form of infectious diseases, are subject, it is well known, to great and sudden variations, and demand incessant vigilance.

But there is no reason for regret at the abandonment of Sheldrake Island as a Quarantine station; for there is a spot in the Miramichi River which seems as it had been placed there for this very purpose, and the rejection of which I cannot account for, except by referring to the tendency which the human mind too often exhibits, to be dissatisfied with the richest gifts of Providence. That spot is Middle Island. It is situated one mile below the Town of Chatham, and about forty rods from the south shore. It is twenty two rods wide and contains eighteen acres. The soil is light and dry, and most of it has been under cultivation. On my first visit I found a well with three feet of water in it. It was, however, in a filthy state; I ordered it be cleared out; I have since drank the water, and had the satisfaction to find that it was perfectly wholesome; was good for washing and culinary purposes; and though a little unpalatable from the oldness of the casks, I do not think a patient parched with fever would refuse it on that score. But if any objection should be made there is a beautiful spring on the opposite bank from which the very best water can be procured in five or ten minutes. And furthermore I am persuaded that water of the first quality may be obtained on the Island, by going below the clay a little beyond the depth of the present well.

I ought, perhaps, to mention here, that I have received the testimony of two men, both of whom had resided for weeks on the Island in Summer, who affirmed that they used during all the time, the

water there, and no other. An objection might possibly be raised on the ground of the nearness of the shore to the Island but it would not be entertained for a moment by any one who had the least knowledge of the laws of infection. Attempts have been made to ascertain the distance to which the poisonous emanations from bodies affected with different diseases may extend, and the result has proved that it is not nearly so great as is generally imagined. According to Doctor Haygarth, the infectious influence of small pox does not in moderate cases, and in the pure air, extend beyond half a yard; and when the distemper is malignant, not more than a few yards from the seat of the poison. He is of opinion that the contagion of fever is confined within a still narrower sphere.

Doctor Clark asserts that the most malignant fever does not render the atmosphere infectious more than a few feet from the patient.

The history of the Island also affords sufficient answer to the objection. It has been used for a Quarantine Station, generally during the last thirty years; at some periods hundreds of patients have been placed there. Last year about three or four hundred arrived in the Port unexpectedly, and were crowded together in sheds by no means large enough to receive them; in the upper part of one of those sheds, a contracted place with only one window in each end, and which was totally unfit for even a solitary patient, one hundred human beings, afflicted with typhus fever in its worst form, were stowed; circumstances in which infection must have attained a state of the utmost intensity; and yet in no instance, according to the testimony of all the medical men both in Chatham and Newcastle has disease been known to reach the shore. I may add that the houses in the vicinity are few and distant from each other.

With respect to the Boom, I am authorized to say that in event of the sale of the Island, it will be relinquished.

It is obvious, moreover that the expense of upholding the Quarantine on this Island must be very much less than on Sheldrake Island.

It is important to inquire what course should be adopted with respect to the Leper Lazaretto. There are some who say it should be abolished altogether. A more injudicious opinion, I conceive, could not be given. From all the information I have been able to collect, with respect to the Leprosy, I think there is strong reason to believe that it is at least communicable by inoculation. Perhaps experiments would be required to determine the point with absolute certainty; but where is the antagonist who would present his own arm for this purpose? Doctors Bayard and Wilson in their learned and elaborate Report, admit that in particular cases it may be imparted in this way; and that those whose skins are peculiarly irritable, may contract it by handling or sleeping with a patient.— Now, without entering into the question, whether this implies contagion or not, it is obvious that it renders the company of a Leper exceedingly undesirable. Who can tell that he has or has not the susceptible skin? Or who on the occurrence of the scratch of a pin, or a pimple or the slightest abrasion, would choose to be subjected to the danger, or even the dread of incurring this disgusting and incurable malady? If the Lepers were allowed to mingle freely with their families, the propagation of the disease from this cause would be inevitable. Again the principal of hereditary taint does not do away with the necessity of separation. I conceive that it is morally wrong to transmit a legacy of this description to posterity. If a man be cursed with this great calamity himself, it is enough—let him not attempt to entail it upon offspring.

The poverty of the Leper furnishes another argument in favor of the Lazaretto. They could not for any length of time, support themselves. The burthen would undoubtedly fall upon the Province, and would probably in a few years become much greater than under the present system. Besides it would be impossible to

secure, in their own habitations, the same advantages, the cleanliness, the comfort, the improved system of diet which are afforded by the Lazaretto. Let justice then be done to those who led the way in the investigation of this subject; who, seeing the difficulties with which it was surrounded, adopted the wisest policy and advised those measures which if rightly carried out, are best adapted to promote the comfort of the patient, and whether the disease be contagious or not, to effect its extinction.

Thus far I have felt no difficulty in forming an opinion. I come now, however, to a subject which has caused me some perplexity. I refer to the removal of the Lazaretto. It must be acknowledged that this is the grand object of desire to the Lepers. Tracadie is their native home, and the residence of their families and friends. It is associated in their minds with the health and happiness of their earlier years: and is endeared to them perhaps the more by the violence with which they were torn from it. The appeal which they made to me to restore them to it again, was affecting. No man could have heard it without having all the sympathies of his heart awakened. I went to Tracadie with a strong hope that I might be able to recommend this change. But I was disappointed. I found that it could not with safety be effected. I was convinced there were not the materials there for maintaining the establishment. The whole management would fall into the hands of the Reverend Monsieur Le France, a gentleman of talent and education; a gentleman from whom I received much kindness, and whose feelings it would grieve me to wound; but I am bound to say that his avowal, and, I believe, conscientious opinions, with respect to the nature of the Leprosy, and the law of Marriage, disqualify him, in my judgment, for acting as an Agent of the Government in this matter.

I think the Lazaretto should remain where it is; but improvements should be made. The buildings should be enlarged and rendered commodious; and particular care should be taken to secure the most thorough ventilation. The Island should be cultivated and embellished.— There should be something in the scenery around him to cheer the poor Leper, and light up the desolation within. It is now four years since the Lazaretto was established on the Island, and it is almost a forest still. It is not reasonable to expect that the patients will be contented with their abode, so long as it wears its present forlorn and dreary aspect.

There is another change I would suggest, viz. the employment of a few of their own people to act as guards or attendants. Let them be bound, if necessary, under a penalty to do their duty; let them obtain sureties, and let these sureties be relations of the Lepers; in this way they will all become interested in carrying out the designs of the Institution. It is of course necessary that all the Lepers shall be placed on the Island. I hope, however, that no more violence will be used for this purpose, at least till all other means shall have been tried for a length of time in vain. I am persuaded that the strong aversion of the Lepers to the Establishment, is attributable, in a great measure, to that odious system. Let kindness, not force be employed.— Some of the Lepers are husbands and fathers. Their families if deprived of their aid, would fall into a state of absolute want; and justice and humanity require that they should be taken under the protection of the Government, and that a liberal allowance be made towards their support. A measure of this kind would operate as a powerful persuasive to induce the Lepers of this class to leave their homes voluntarily, and would strengthen them to bear, with resignation their dismal imprisonment.

I need scarcely observe, that I entirely concur in all that has been said by medical men who have preceded me, with respect to the importance of adopting measures to prevent the development of Leprosy in those who are afflicted with an hereditary taint. With this view, I con-