

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, No. 4.

MONDAY, 28TH JANUARY, 1889.

PRESENT:

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR
(SIR G. WILLIAM DES VOEUX, K.C.M.G.)

The Honourable the Colonial Secretary, (FREDERICK STEWART).
 „ the Attorney General, (EDWARD LOUGHLIN O'MALLEY).
 „ the Acting Colonial Treasurer, (HENRY ERNEST WODEHOUSE, C.M.G.).
 „ the Surveyor General, (JOHN MACNEILE PRICE).
 „ the Captain Superintendent of Police, (WALTER MEREDITH DEANE).
 „ the Registrar General, (JAMES HALDANE STEWART LOCKHART).
 „ WONG SHING.
 „ JOHN BELL-IRVING.
 „ BENDYSHE LAYTON, (*vice* the Honourable ALEXANDER PALMER MAC EWEN).

ABSENT:

The Honourable PHINEAS RYRIE.
 „ CATCHICK PAUL CHATER.

The Council met pursuant to notice.

The Minutes of the last Meeting, held on the 17th instant, were read and confirmed.

FAMINE IN NORTH CHINA.—Read the following Message from His Excellency the Governor:—

G. WILLIAM DES VOEUX.

The Governor deems it his duty to draw the attention of the Council to the terrible famine in North China, with a view to the consideration whether some contribution in aid of the sufferers should not be made from the funds of this Colony. Similar calamities are unfortunately only too common among the dense population of the neighbouring Empire; and sympathy is apt to be paralysed, or rather its manifestation checked, by their very magnitude, and the consequent hopelessness of affording relief at all proportionate to the enormous need for it. But if this consideration were allowed always to have weight, charity would be confined within exceedingly narrow limits, if not altogether extinguished. And the only questions really deserving to be considered, either by Governments or by individuals, in respect of any particular case of suffering is (1) whether it is one, in aid of which some portion of the means at disposal may be appropriately used, having regard to the many other objects deserving attention, and (2) whether in case of aid being afforded there is reasonable probability of its being properly and usefully applied.

As regards the first question, the position of a Government differs from that of an individual in this, that the former is not free to give play to sympathy, and must confine its action to a comparatively limited field. For the funds at its disposal being held as a trust, any application of them can be properly made only when, proportionately to its extent, it is beneficial directly or indirectly, to the contributing taxpayers, or when, though not materially beneficial to them, it is one which meets with their general concurrence.

After much consideration, the Governor has arrived at the conclusion that a reasonable contribution from the funds of the Colony towards the aid of the sufferers by the present calamity would fulfil one and probably both of the above conditions. For such a token of sympathy would tend materially to promote and strengthen those friendly relations with China, which are so all-important to the prosperity of Hongkong; while, having regard to the exceptional magnitude of the present calamity on the one hand, and to the favourable condition of the Colonial finances on the other, there would probably be but one opinion in the Colony as to the expediency of such a contribution, if the second of the above questions can be answered satisfactorily, *viz.*: that as to the proper application of the contributed funds.

But happily on this point also there is a satisfactory reply. The papers which will be laid on the table show that the local authorities at Shanghai having, in the urgent need of their countrymen, made appeal for assistance, Europeans and Chinese have alike responded to it, and being drawn together by the bond of a common humanity are working in unison for the establishment of relief-agencies. When moreover regard is had to the number and names of those who are taking part in this movement, there can be no more opening for reasonable doubt that any aid afforded will be properly applied than that such aid is urgently required.

As to the amount of contribution, the Governor, all things considered, is of opinion that it should be at least ten thousand dollars. He therefore invites the Council to pass a vote for that amount; he proposes to remit this, or any other sum which may meet with the approval of the Council, to H.M.'s Consul-General at Shanghai, with the request that he and the other British Consular Officers stationed there will apportion the fund among the various relief agencies, without any regard to religious or denominational prejudices, in such a manner as, according to their joint discretion, may appear likely to do most good.

As no possible amount of contributions can afford substantial relief to all, or even to any large proportion, of the millions who are suffering from this calamity, the Governor hopes that the vote which he now proposes will not prove to be a check but will rather operate as a stimulus, to that private benevolence for which the community of Hongkong is so honourably known; and he trusts that here also as at Shanghai, Europeans and Chinese will exert themselves for an object which appeals alike, if not equally, to the sympathies of both.

By Command,

FREDERICK STEWART,
Colonial Secretary.

Government House, Hongkong, 28th January, 1889.

^{C.S.O.}
_{213 of 1889.} The Colonial Secretary, by direction of His Excellency the Governor, laid on the table the correspondence on the subject.

The Colonial Secretary moved that the question be referred for the consideration of the Finance Committee.

The Acting Treasurer seconded.

Question—put and passed.

ADJOURNMENT.—The Council then adjourned *sine die*.

G. WILLIAM DES VOEUX,
Governor.

Read and confirmed, this 25th day of February, 1889.

ARATHOON SETH,
Clerk of Councils.