

20TH DECEMBER, 1897.

PRESENT:—

His EXCELLENCY the GOVERNOR, Sir WILLIAM ROBINSON, G.C.M.G.

His EXCELLENCY Major-General BLACK, C.B. (Officer Commanding the Forces).

Hon. J. H. STEWART LOCKHART (Colonial Secretary).

Hon. R. MURRAY RUMSEY (Harbour Master).

Hon. F. H. MAY, C.M.G. (Captain Superintendent of Police).

Hon. T. SERCOMBE SMITH (Colonial Treasurer).

Hon. R. D. ORMSBY (Director of Public Works).

Hon. C. P. CHATER, C.M.G.

Hon. HO KAI.

Hon. T. H. WHITEHEAD.

Hon. WEI A YUK.

Mr. J. G. T. BUCKLE (Clerk of Councils).

MINUTES.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

FINANCE COMMITTEES REPORT.

The report of the Finance Committee (No. 12) was adopted on the motion of the COLONIAL SECRETARY, seconded by the COLONIAL TREASURER.

LIGHT DUES.

The HARBOUR MASTER—Sir, I rise to move the resolution standing in my name. Section 33 of Ordinance 26 of 1891 provides that the rate of light dues shall be fixed by order of the G o -

vernor pursuant to a resolution of this Council, and the resolution which I am about to move will be the first step towards fixing the rate of light dues from the 1st January next. The subject of light dues is one which has received a considerable amount of attention and much has been written and spoken on the subject, but not in all cases have those who have written or spoken had a very intimate knowledge of the subject. As an instance of this kind I would point to a letter, which was laid on this table, written by my friend the Secretary of the P. and O. Company to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in which it was confidently stated that 5,772,289 tons, which was the amount of European shipping entering this harbour in 1895, would at the rate of 1 cent. per ton for light dues produce upwards of \$57,000. This was inaccurate and 30 per cent. out. As a matter of fact 1 cent per ton for light dues in 1895 would have produced \$43,557, instead of, as he says, upwards of \$57,000. Many other instances of inaccuracy are also to be found in the petition which was forwarded to the Government and signed by the members of the leading commercial firms and others. One of those inaccuracies was the statement that the taxing of ships in aid of the general revenue was opposed to the policy of the leading commercial nations. I do not suppose that those gentlemen who signed that petition, even if they read it—which is not always the

practice in this colony—would object to my saying that the United States of America might be considered a leading commercial nation. Well, 1886 they levied a tax of 6 to 30 cents per ton per annum, on shipping entering United States Ports and the money raised was applied first to the extinction of the public debt; secondly, to the cost of national defence; and thirdly, to public uses generally. There is another inaccuracy in the petition. The petitioners said—"We very much doubt if in any civilized country has a deliberate attempt ever been made to raise a profit revenue out of light dues. They have always been imposed for the express purpose of providing for the construction and maintenance of lighthouses, buoys, and beacons and for no other purpose whatsoever." I asked just now that the United States of America might be considered as a leading commercial nation. Now, I do not suppose there will be any objection to England or the United Kingdom being taken as a highly "civilized country." In 1888 the light dues in England were raised by 5 per cent. to supply a deficit in the Mercantile Marine Fund, and in 1892 there was sufficient surplus to pay off £100,000 debt of that fund. There are many other instances of inaccuracy in the petition, but the most astounding of them all is the one which asserts that a levy of $2\frac{1}{2}$ cents per ton on shipping coming to this port would deter ships from coming to it. The assertion, sir, is in my opinion so utterly ridiculous that it is not worth while taking up the time of the Council half one minute with arguments against it. There were no arguments in favour of it; it was just a bare assertion, and I think it will be more complimentary to the gentlemen who signed that petition to believe that in making if they did not err in ignorance but that it was merely to raise a bogey to scart the Government into their own way of thinking. The effect of the resolution which I have the honour to propose will be that from the 1st January next the largest ship which has up to the present day entered this port will pay as her contribution, when she comes here next, trading in the waters of the colony, £4. That same ship will be capable of carrying cargo amounting to about 7,000 tons, and at the rate of freight—which will not be exceptional—of 30/- she will earn in freight £10,000, and she will come here and pay £4. The average ship that comes here will pay \$13 and the river steamers, aggregating a tonnage of nearly $1\frac{3}{4}$ million tons, will pay \$2,500—\$2,500 for $1\frac{3}{4}$ million tons. Side by side with that they will be paying five or six times that amount to the Government of China for one or two Chinese ports they enter. They will be earning nearly \$600,000 in passage money of Chinese only for those ports and they will be paying their shareholders 16 per cent. Borrowing, sir, from a phrase which has become almost a sort of catch-word among a certain section of the community, namely, that "shipping is the life blood of this colony," I submit to the Council that what is chiefly remarkable is the miserably feeble amount of sustenance which the colony will derive from its so-called life blood. (Hear, hear.) With these remarks I beg to move the resolution.

The resolution provides for the exaction of light dues from the 1st of January next on all ships entering the waters of the colony at the rate of 1 per cent. per ton. All steamers plying only between Hongkong and Canton, or Macao, or the West River, which enter the waters of the colony by day, and all junks, are exempt, and those which enter by night, shall pay one-third of a cent per ton.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY seconded.

Hon. T. H. WHITEHEAD—Sir, I have listened with very great attention to the remarks of the Hon. the Harbour Master, and on the spur of the moment I am not in a position to accept as Gospel all that he has said; but I have not the least doubt that what he has said is founded on the best information that was at his disposal. I think it is an extremely fortunate thing for Hongkong that the home authorities have taken the same view of this question as that held by the local shipping community. The shipping have throughout been very desirous that shipping should pay its own way and that what money is required for the upkeep of the lighthouses and the maintenance and regulation of the harbour should be borne by the shipping. I have not the least doubt in the world that Macao is actuated by wise motives in following the example which had been originally set by Hongkong in making Macao a free port. I think that we might even go further and do as others have suggested in Hongkong, namely, that the Hongkong Government should offer a premium to shipping to come here. It would pay us in the end; I am sure it would, sir. The more shipping we attract here the greater will be our trade and greater the attending advantages. In every direction we should gain by taking such a step. My friend (the Harbour Master) smiles, but I can smile also. I think the community of Hongkong will long remain under a great debt of gratitude to your Excellency for having recommended the home Government to limit the dues on shipping to what will simply reimburse the Government for the outlay thereon. I have no amendment to propose and I shall support the resolution.

The resolution was carried.

THE NEW PUBLIC OFFICES.

In pursuance of notice Hon. T. H. WHITEHEAD asked the following question:—Will the Government lay upon the table a copy of the correspondence which has passed between the home authorities and the Colonial Government

in connection with the proposed new Public Offices subsequent to that already published?

The COLONIAL SECRETARY—The question of new Public Offices has been referred to the Public Works Committee of this Council. It is not proposed to publish any further papers in connection with this matter until the report of that Committee has been received.

NATURALIZATION ORDINANCE.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY, in the absence of the Attorney-General, who was engaged at the Supreme Court, moved the first reading of a Bill entitled an Ordinance for the naturalization of Wong Chuk-yau, alias Wong Mau, alias Wong Sün-in.

The COLONIAL TREASURER seconded.

Bill read the first time.

MISDEMEANOURS PUNISHMENT ORDINANCE.

The COLONIAL SECRETARY moved the first reading of a Bill entitled an Ordinance for the more effectual punishment of bribery and certain other misdemeanours.

The COLONIAL TREASURER seconded.

Bill read the first time.

THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE SEASON.

His EXCELLENCY—That is all the business, gentlemen. In order that you may thoroughly enjoy your Christmas holidays, which have been well earned, I propose to adjourn the Council *sine die* and I am glad to be able to do so without any prejudice to the public service whatever. I take this opportunity of wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. (Applause.)

