

20TH SEPTEMBER, 1906.

PRESENT:—

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR, SIR MATTHEW NATHAN, K.C.M.G.

Hon. COLONEL DARLING, R.E. (Officer Commanding the Troops).

Hon. Mr. T. SERCOMBE SMITH (Colonial Secretary).

Hon. Sir H. S. BERKELEY, K.C. (Attorney-General).

Hon. Mr. A. M. THOMSON (Colonial Treasurer).

Hon. Captain L. A. W. BARNES-LAWRENCE, R.N. (Harbour Master).

Hon. Mr. W. CHATHAM (Director of Public Works).

Hon. Mr. F. J. BADELEY (Captain-superintendent of Police).

Hon. Dr. Ho Kai, M.B., C.M., C.M.G.

Hon. Mr. WEI YUK.

Hon. Mr. E. A. HEWETT.

Hon. Mr. W. J. GRESSON.

MINUTES.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

HIS EXCELLENCY said—Arising out of the minutes there is a point with regard to which I have been asked to make an explanation to the Council. It may have appeared from the debate on the second reading of the

Bill to amend the Code of Civil Procedure that the legal profession had not been consulted by His Honour the Chief Justice when drafting the Bill. I can say from personal knowledge that they were consulted, and I have been given to understand that they concurred generally in the scope and provisions of the Bill.

THE TYPHOON: RELIEF MEASURES AND EXPRESSIONS OF SYMPATHY.

HIS EXCELLENCY—Gentlemen: Hongkong has just suffered from a catastrophe as calamitous, if not more so, than any which has previously befallen the Colony. The loss of life and property between the hours of nine and eleven on Tuesday morning are, as far as can be at present judged, greater than those incurred in the great typhoon of 1874. None of us are likely to forget the scenes of that morning. First of all we saw, when the typhoon gun was fired about nine o'clock, crowds of helpless shipping drifting to the east before the wind. Then the whole scene was wiped out by the blown sheets of rain, and an hour later, the atmosphere being again clear, we saw that the junk and small craft had disappeared and that many of the large ships were aground or in distress. What had happened to the Chinese boats was evidenced by the appalling scenes of desolation along the Praya and the Kowloon shore. I need not, however, dwell on scenes nor recount the losses that were witnessed and are known to all of you. It has been suggested in the Press that much of the loss of life and property would have been avoided if the Observatory had given earlier notice of the approach of the typhoon, and that such earlier notice should have been possible. I see no grounds for believing this possibility, but it is due to the public, and also to the Director of the Observatory that an inquiry should be held into it. I have accordingly asked the Commodore to detail a senior officer of the

Royal Navy to preside over a small committee of which I propose that the other members should be a master mariner, to be nominated by the Chamber of Commerce, and the manager of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, if he will be good enough to serve. A bright feature in the gloomy picture of this great calamity has been the many acts of heroism and of duty performed in saving life by civilians, police and sailors. I shall cause an inquiry to be made into these so that they may be duly recorded and recognised. The Harbour Department, which was fortunate in keeping all its vessels, has done the utmost possible with them, and will continue the work of clearing the harbour of debris as rapidly as possible. The Tung Wa Hospital had its launches out saving lives as long as it could be hoped that there were any left to be saved and has afforded and is affording shelter to the many Chinese left destitute by the loss of their floating habitations. The Commodore readily met my request to send out all craft that were left to him, not themselves damaged, to pick up any persons that might be found clinging to wreckage outside the harbour. Unfortunately the new typhoon, signalled about six o'clock last night, brought an end to the period during which it could be hoped to save such persons. Two torpedo boat destroyers that were out on this duty last night were, I am glad to say, able to regain the harbour this morning. The Commander of the United States vessel "Callao" volunteered to co-operate with our own Naval Authorities, and his offer was gladly accepted. The Military Authorities kindly let me have 150 men yesterday to clear wreckage which it was thought might cover bodies, and my hon. and gallant friend on my right has been good enough to promise me other working parties to clear wharves at present so blocked as to prevent the business of loading and unloading ships proceeding (applause). We have now to consider what steps should be taken to afford relief to the large number of Chinese who have lost their homes and properties. The majority have, unfortunately, also lost their lives, and so are beyond relief. The Chinese charitable institutions are, I understand, looking after the immediate needs of those who are left destitute. But some more permanent assistance is required, and for this I propose that a public subscription should be started. I consulted yesterday morning the directors of the Tung Wa Hospital, and the Po Leung Kok and the District Watchmen Committee in this matter, and they agreed to start at once raising a charitable fund. They agreed also that Dr. Ho Kai, Mr. Wei Yuk, Mr. Fung Wa-chun, Mr. Lau Chu-pak and Mr. Fang Chi-ngong (Chairman of Tung Wa directors) should represent them on a general committee, to which I propose to appoint also Sir Paul Chater, Mr. E. A. Hewett, Mr. W. J. Gresson, Capt. Barnes-Lawrence, the Registrar-general and Mr. H. E. R. Hunter, if they will kindly consent to serve. I will ask Mr. Hunter to act also as

treasurer to the committee and to receive a donation of \$500 from myself and \$100 from the Colonial Secretary. I propose that this Council should vote to the fund a sum equal to that obtained from private subscriptions. As regards further assistance from the Government, I should like the committee to consider whether any scheme by which the Government would lend money on security, but without interest, for the building of native craft could be devised which would be helpful to junk-owners and not unduly onerous on the Government. They must bear in mind that the Government's losses have been heavy, and it would be ineffectual for Government to grant money with one hand and take it away by additional taxation with the other. In many cases of loss of life all that we can give is, from the nature of the cases, our sympathy. The Colony will, I am sure, grieve that a French torpedo-boat destroyer should have been lost while enjoying the hospitality of our port, and that this loss should have been accompanied by that of five brave sailors. I took it upon myself to express sympathy to Admiral Richard, the French Commander-in-chief in the Far East, and have received a telegram in reply saying how deeply this expression had touched the whole French Far Eastern fleet. The Council will forgive me if I now refer for a moment to a personal as well as a public loss. I fear that there are no grounds for hope that we shall over again see Bishop Hoare. He was a man we all respected, and those among us who knew him well loved him well. I am sure that the Council and the public sympathize deeply with his bereaved wife and children. The Colony in its turn has received sympathy which it will value. Sir Henry Blake has telegraphed from Kandy:—

"I desire to express deep sympathy with the people of Hongkong in the serious calamity repeating the disaster of 1900."

The Governor of Macao has telegraphed:—

"Je prie que votre Excellence veuille bien accepter l'expression de notre sympathie et sinceres condoléances pour la catastrophe qui a touché Hongkong".

The Secretary of State has telegraphed:—

"Your telegram of 18th September received with great regret. I especially deplore the great loss of life which the storm has caused. I shall be glad to learn further particulars and full details by post of the measures taken for the relief of sufferers. I would wish you to express on behalf of His Majesty's Government their sympathy with the community of Hongkong at this great disaster."

Lord Elgin has also sent the following message, which I ask you to receive standing:—

"I am commanded by His Majesty the King to express the deep regret with which His Majesty has learned of the great calamity which has befallen the Colony of Hongkong. His Majesty grieved to read of the immense loss of life among the Chinese population which your telegram reports. I am to convey through you an expression of His Majesty's sympathy with the immediate sufferers and with the whole community."

I propose that the King's message should be placarded in the town in English and Chinese, and I ask you to approve of the following replies which I suggest should be sent to the telegrams I have read to you:—

To Sir Henry Blake I propose to telegraph:—

"The Legislative Council on behalf of the people of Hongkong express their gratitude for your sympathetic message."

To the Governor of Macao I propose to telegraph:—

"La Colonie représentée par le Conseil Legislatif vous remercie cordialement pour votre dépêche si sympathique."

To the Secretary of State I purpose to say:—

"Legislative Council of Hongkong express their heartfelt thanks for the sympathy of His Majesty's Government on the disastrous effects of the storm of September 18th. The Council, Chinese Charitable Institutions, European firms and residents will do what is in their power to relieve the distressed."

In reply to His Majesty's message I propose to say—

"Please convey to His Majesty the King this humble expression of the great appreciation of the Colony of Hongkong, represented by its Legislative Council, for His Most Gracious Majesty's sympathy for the catastrophe which has befallen the Colony, and inform His Majesty that his people here respond with feelings of deepest loyalty to his loving care of them in this their distress" (applause).

In conclusion, I have to express my confidence that the Colony will bear the trial that has come to it with that characteristic which was looked upon by the ancient Romans as the highest of virtues, and is certainly an attribute of every great people, including both the British and Chinese—I mean equanimity, or the equal mind. Hongkong has had a set-back, but this will, I feel sure, call forth additional energy and

earnestness of purpose, so that it will not be long before it will have retrieved its losses and advanced further than before towards its great commercial and civilising ends (applause).

Hon. Dr. HO KAI—Sir, I am sure members of the Council have listened with great interest and appreciation to the various messages and telegrams sent to us condoling with us in our calamity, notably the gracious message of His Most Gracious Majesty the King, and also those from the Secretary of State, the Governor of Macao and Sir Henry Blake. We all deeply deplore the sad catastrophe, and I am sure, as Your Excellency has just mentioned, that the community will bear its losses of life and property with a resolute equanimity. At the same time it is well that those who are not able to help themselves, and those who have suffered, should have help from those able to afford it, and I am pleased indeed, Sir, that you have already appointed a relief committee which will at once take measures to relieve the suffering. I am sure every member of that committee will work for the sufferers, and anything which the Government can do in the way of assisting will be, I am sure, appreciated by the whole of the Chinese community. Members of the Council must also join with Your Excellency in expressing deepest sympathy with Mrs. Hoare in her great loss. The Bishop was a man very much respected by all who knew him, and beloved by all who have been privileged to make his acquaintance or claim his friendship. To all those who have suffered losses, especially losses of relations and friends, we extend our sympathy, and I hope that in a very short time, when the committee gets to work, we shall be able to relieve many in distress.

HON. MR. HEWETT—Sir, after the remarks made by the senior unofficial member, very little remains for me to say; but I think, representing the section of the community I have the honour to do in this Chamber, it is only fitting I should refer to some of the points in Your Excellency's remarks. The loss to the Colony is, we all know, unfortunately very great, and the loss of life is terrible; but I feel confident that already the Colony is pulling itself together, and that it will not be long before we get the whole of our business in train and that the progress of Hongkong will go on as if, comparatively speaking, there had been no such check. Your Excellency has referred to the question of appointing a commission to deal with the point raised very generally amongst the public as to whether earlier notice might have been given of the approaching storm by the Observatory, and consequently a mitigation brought about of the great disaster which has befallen us. Holding the position I have the honour to do, I have made it my business to make inquiries from certain experts competent to form an opinion, and feel quite confident that the finding of the commission will be that it will exonerate the

Director and staff of the Observatory. I trust sincerely that this will be so, and firmly believe that it will. With regard to the relief fund, I am sure Your Excellency's proposal will meet with the most cordial support of the whole community. The committee will no doubt get to work at the earliest possible moment, for we all know that on occasions of this sort there is only one axiom to work upon and that is "those who give quickly give twice." Your Excellency referred to the possibility of advances being made under certain conditions to former registered owners of cargo boats to enable them to recover themselves. The proposal is a sound one, and will receive the earnest consideration of the committee. It should result in great good to the native shipping population who have suffered so terribly in this disaster. Another point to which I must refer, and I feel justified in doing so, is the sympathetic remarks made by Your Excellency with regard to the loss of Bishop Hoare. I feel confident that I am as well qualified as any one in the Colony to endorse the remarks of Your Excellency and the senior unofficial member. I have had the honour of his friendship for nearly thirty years, and I am sure the community will endorse me when I say that he was an upright and God-fearing man, and that uprightly, sincerely and without fear or favour he carried out the work provided for him by his Master, and in the execution of which he lost his life. We deplore his untimely loss and join in offering our most sincere and respectful sympathy to those left to mourn him. It is satisfactory in the trouble in which we find ourselves to

find sympathy from outside. The gracious message of His Majesty I am sure will be received by the whole Colony with grateful affection. The messages from the Secretary of State, the Governor of Macao and Sir Henry Blake all express sympathy which we know is thoroughly sincere. I don't think it is necessary for me to add anything more. I am sure we are all deeply indebted to Your Excellency for the prompt manner in which you dealt with the disaster, and the steps you have taken to endeavour to mitigate the misfortunes of those who have suffered by it (applause).

HIS EXCELLENCY—It is not proposed to proceed with the business on the order of the day. The Council stands adjourned until this day week.

JAPAN'S SYMPATHY.

The following message was received from Viscount Hayashi through Mr. Kumabe, Imperial Japanese Consul, after the Council meeting:—"convey to Sir Matthew Nathan expression of very sincere and profound sympathy at terrible catastrophe which visited Hongkong."

H.E. the Governor has asked Mr. Kumabe to convey to Viscount Hayashi his grateful thanks for his very kind message of sympathy which will be very much appreciated by the Colony of Hongkong.

