

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL NO. 18.

WEDNESDAY, 1ST APRIL, 1885.

PRESENT:

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR

(SIR GEORGE FERGUSON BOWEN, G.C.M.G.)

His Honour the Chief Justice, (SIR GEORGE PHILLIPPO, Knt.)

The Honourable the Colonial Secretary, (WILLIAM HENRY MARSH, C.M.G.)

„ the Attorney General, (EDWARD LOUGHLIN O'MALLEY.)

„ the Colonial Treasurer, (ALFRED LISTER.)

„ the Surveyor General, (JOHN MACNEILE PRICE.)

„ the Registrar General (FREDERICK STEWART, LL.D.)

„ PHINEAS RYRIE.

„ WILLIAM KESWICK.

„ THOMAS JACKSON.

„ FREDERICK DAVID SASSOON.

„ WONG SHING.

The Council met in pursuance of adjournment.

Minutes read and confirmed.

PAPERS.—The Colonial Secretary laid on the table Telegrams and Correspondence respecting the Armament of the Forts of Hongkong.

DIRECT TELEGRAPH LINE TO SINGAPORE.—TORPEDO LAUNCHES.—The Honourable THOMAS JACKSON, pursuant to notice, moved the following resolution:—

"That in the Opinion of this Council, there ought to be direct Telegraphic Communication between Hongkong and Singapore, the nearest British Settlement; and that immediate steps be taken to supplement the defences of Hongkong, by obtaining with the least possible delay a flotilla of Torpedo Launches fully equipped."

The Honourable P. RYRIE seconded, and addressed the Council.

The Honourable W. KESWICK addressed the Council.

His Excellency the Governor addressed the Council, and spoke as follows:—

HONOURABLE GENTLEMEN OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL,—I am very glad indeed that my Honourable friend who so worthily represents in this Council the Chamber of Commerce, has brought forward this most important resolution; and I thank him and I thank the two Honourable members who supported him for the way in which they have spoken of myself and of the Executive of this Colony. I hope that this resolution will be carried unanimously. As the Honourable member said, it is owing to my exertions that the Un-official element in this Council was increased from two to five, and that the Chamber of Commerce was invited to nominate its own representative. I am sure from the able speeches my Honourable friend has made on this and other occasions, and from his high character and position, that the Chamber of Commerce could not have made a better choice. In fact I look upon my Honourable friend as a living, and I am happy to add, flourishing, proof of the success of my policy. I said just now that I hoped that this resolution would be passed unanimously, and I said so because it would give great strength to recommendations I have already made on the same subject to Her Majesty's Government. The fact is, gentlemen, that a truly paternal Governor on this as on other occasions has anticipated the wishes of his children. A great English statesman some years ago—I refer to Sir ROBERT PEEL—said it was the first duty of a statesman to be a little, but not too much, in advance of the people over whom he rules. Now it can be proved by documentary evidence that I have been in this question of defence twelve months at least in advance, not of the Royal Engineer Officers, and others to whom my Honourable friend on my left (Honourable W. KESWICK) referred just now as having given special attention to the subject, but of general opinion in this community. I can only say that when I came here there was no general agitation on the subject of defences, and it was I who then first raised the question with the Imperial Government. I have prepared a minute showing exactly what has been done, and quoting from various documents, and with the permission of the Council I will now read that minute:—

"I arrived at Hongkong on March 30th, 1883; and six weeks afterwards, after careful study of the subject, I opened the question of the Defences of this Colony by an elaborate despatch to the Secretary of State (Lord DERBY), dated May 12th, 1883. In that Despatch, after entering fully into details, I concluded as follows:—

I submit that your Lordship should move the War Office to prepare a full and final plan for the defences of Hongkong, and that such plan should be transmitted by Her Majesty's Government to both the Governor and the General Commanding the troops, with instructions to use all the authority and influence of their respective offices in assisting in carrying it into execution. The Major-General Commanding has read this despatch, and authorises me to state that he cordially agrees with my views in every respect. He fully concurs as to the urgent necessity of the War Office finally deciding on a complete plan of defence, and of that plan being carried into execution without unavoidable delay.

I may here observe that in the phrase "full and final plan," I referred to those various and conflicting schemes to which my honourable friend alluded just now. I knew, of course, that various Engineer Officers had proposed various plans, but none had been adopted, and the great point was that a full and final plan should be decided upon.

"After several detailed statements and arguments, I proceeded as follows:—

It has been frequently shown that Hongkong commands our Trade Routes in the Far East; that shipping to the amount of above five millions of tons (a larger tonnage than that which entered the port of London 40 years ago) yearly enters this port; and that it is of paramount importance not to suffer any nation, or any possible confederacy of nations, to destroy or lessen the prestige and influence of Great Britain with China and Japan, those rich and vast countries which have in all human probability a great future before them in the history of the world.

"Such, Honourable gentlemen, was the language in which I opened the question of our defences just six weeks after my first arrival here. And I have followed up this opening by a long series of official despatches and (what has proved still more effective), of private letters to my personal friends among English statesmen and among the chief Military Authorities at the War Office. I cannot, of course, publish correspondence much of which is of a confidential character; but I am ready to show it to any member of this Council. I know that you, Honourable gentlemen, like myself, deprecate any irresponsible chatter' (as one of you has truly called it), which could have no other result but to point out any weak point in the armour of our country to our possible enemies—to all who fear or who envy the greatness of England. A perusal of my correspondence on this subject will show that what has been done, and is doing, for the defences of this Colony, is due mainly to my constant and persistent representations, aided, of course, by General Sargent, and by the other naval and military authorities. I am in cordial co-operation with Admiral Sir W. DOWELL, and with General CAMERON, who possess the entire confidence of the Admiralty and of the War Office; and this community can place full reliance on their prudence and energy. Sir W. DOWELL is now temporarily absent in the execution of measures which, if they could be divulged, would be regarded by all of you as the best calculated alike for the protection of our trade and of English interests generally in this quarter of the globe, and also for the protection of Hongkong. The Admiral has authorised me to state, moreover, that there will remain *permanently* in this harbour the formidable ironclad *Wivern*—now fully manned and equipped—and five other men-of-war, together with four torpedo boats, and a large provision of submarine mines. I may add that I have recently received a letter from the highest official military authority in England, in which he writes that with the 'defensive power' of various kinds already provided, or which will shortly be provided for this harbour, 'you should laugh to scorn the possible attacks of the ships of all other nations now in the China seas.'

"I am sorry to be obliged to detain you so long; but I must now tell you precisely what has already been done with regard to the two subjects referred to in the Resolution proposed by my Honourable friend.

"(1.) The Government entirely agree that 'there ought to be direct Telegraphic Communication between Hongkong and Singapore.' I have already communicated with the Imperial Government on this subject, both by telegraph and by despatch. I also brought it before the Executive Council, which, after full consideration, passed the following Minute:—

The Council advise that, in the present depressed state of the Colonial Revenue, it is impossible that this Colony should give any substantial contribution towards a direct telegraphic cable to Singapore, which is desirable for Imperial rather than for Colonial, for naval and military rather than for commercial interests.

"I have communicated on this point also with the Acting Governor of the Straits Settlements, who informs me that his Government, like that of Hongkong, is unable to give any substantial aid to the proposed scheme.

I was informed by the Manager of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company that a direct Telegraph cable to Singapore would cost about £400,000, that is, about twice the total annual revenue of this Colony; but I have been informed since that that is probably an extravagant estimate. It appears that the Company would require a guarantee of £20,000 yearly for twenty years. It is possible that the

Imperial Government might be inclined to give a guarantee, or to aid in some other way.

"(2.) With regard to the second point of the Resolution now before the Council, viz., the provision of a 'flotilla of torpedo boats,' I have already stated that Admiral Sir W. DOWELL has informed me that four torpedo boats, fully equipped, are attached to this harbour. After consultation with him, I have asked the Imperial Government, both by telegraph and despatch, to provide four more torpedo-boats, making eight in all, which the naval authorities consider amply sufficient. I may here add that the naval authorities believe that the Auxiliary Flotilla, formed of six of the steam-launches belonging to the Colonial Government, will afford very valuable aid. At my request, the Imperial Government has provided the Colony with a full equipment for this Flotilla of 7-pounder guns and Nordenfeldt machine-guns, and of rifles and revolvers for the crews, together with a large supply of ammunition. I am informed that two of the Government steam-launches can be fitted for torpedos.

"There are several other points connected with the subject of our Defences to which I should like to refer, if this Minute were not already longer than I intended. I should not omit, however, to mention that, more than a year ago, I strongly recommended the increase of the Garrison by a considerable force of Artillery and another regiment of the line. As you are aware, a second battery of the Royal Artillery was sent out at once. It is impossible that, at the present crisis, a second battalion of English infantry should be spared; but I have been assured that arrangements have been made for sending here as soon as possible at least one regiment of Indian troops and two more batteries of Artillery, making four batteries in all.

"In conclusion, I would observe that nothing can be further from my intention, in writing this Minute, than to claim any special credit for the constant, zealous, and successful efforts which I have made during the last two years for the improvement of our Defences. I feel that I have only discharged what is one of the first duties of the Governor of this Colony at the existing crisis."

If no other Honourable gentleman wishes to address the Council I will now put the resolution to the vote, and I repeat that I hope it will be carried unanimously, for it is calculated to add force to the recommendations I have already made to the Imperial Government on the subjects of which it treats.

Question—put and passed.

THE BILL ENTITLED THE BILLS OF EXCHANGE ORDINANCE, 1885, IN COMMITTEE.—On the motion of the Attorney General, the Council resumed consideration, in Committee, of the Bill entitled *The Bills of Exchange Ordinance*, 1885.

Progress reported at the Schedule.

PRIVATE BILL.—SECOND READING.—On the motion of the Attorney General, seconded by the Colonial Secretary, the *Bill for the Incorporation of the Roman Catholic Vicar Apostolic of Hongkong*, was read a second time.

A BILL TO AMEND THE POST OFFICE ORDINANCE.—NOTICE OF FIRST READING.—The Attorney General gave notice that at the next Meeting of Council he would move the first reading of this Bill.

ADJOURNMENT OF THE OTHER ORDER OF THE DAY.—The Attorney General moved the postponement of the other Order of the day.

Question—put and passed.

The Council adjourned until Wednesday, the 8th instant, at 4 P.M.

G. F. BOWEN,
Governor.

Read and confirmed, this 8th day of April, 1885.

ARATHOON SETH,
Clerk of Councils.