

*Speech of His Excellency the Governor at the opening of the Session
for 1884 of the Legislative Council of Hongkong.*

HONOURABLE GENTLEMEN OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL,

1. It is with feelings of much pleasure and interest that I now open the first Session of the re-constituted Legislature of Hongkong, and have recourse to your advice and assistance in the administration of the Government.

2. It will always be one of the most satisfactory reminiscences of my long public career that I have been able to procure a more adequate representation in this Council of the community at large. I am confident that the Government will derive valuable aid from the local knowledge and experience of the Unofficial Members, and I also believe that you will all agree with me that there neither is, nor ought to be, any antagonism between the Official and the Unofficial element in this Legislature. All the Members alike can have no other object but to secure the general welfare, and to advance the progress of the Colony.

3. For obvious reasons, it is in the highest degree important that this Council should adhere to the constitutional forms followed by the Legislatures of the other principal Crown Colonies. The address of the Governor at the opening of each annual session will contain, here as elsewhere, a general view of the financial and social condition of the Colony, and a statement of the Legislative and other measures, and of the public works proposed. So the address of the Council in reply will afford the Members of the Legislature the usual constitutional opportunity of expressing their opinion of the conduct and proposals of the Government.)

4. Further, in accordance with the practice elsewhere, I recommend you to appoint a Committee of Finance (which should be a Committee of the whole Council), a Committee of Laws, and a Committee of Public Works, which should respectively examine in the first instance the details of every proposed vote and measure.

5. After this brief explanatory preface, I will proceed to state generally the principal subjects to which your attention will be directed during the present Session. Full details will be found in the papers which will be laid before you, and in the statements of the several Heads of Departments.

6. In the first place, with regard to the paramount question of Finance, it is very satisfactory to be able to inform you that our position is satisfactory. The Revenue of the year 1883 amounted to \$1,286,500; and the *Ordinary* Expenditure

to \$1,165,700; leaving an excess of revenue over *Ordinary* Expenditure of \$120,800. The *Extraordinary* Expenditure of 1883 was defrayed from the accumulated Balances, and included the

Tai-tam Water Works,	\$90,966
Break-water,	22,510
Causeway Bay Reclamation,	9,000
Purchase of Houses and Land for the New Central Market,	21,000
Sanitary Works,	30,483
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Total,	\$173,959
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The Estimated Balance to the credit of the Colony on the 31st December, 1883, was \$1,095,505.

7. Hongkong is probably the only State or Colony of importance which at the present day is not only without a Public Debt, but which possesses invested Assets nearly equal to its annual revenue. However, the existing Balances will not be sufficient to carry out several Public Works which are urgently required by this Community, in addition to those "strong and complete measures of sanitation" which Mr. CHADWICK (the Civil Engineer recently sent out from England) has reported to be absolutely necessary "for the immediate benefit of the public health." Under these circumstances, I concur with the Executive Council in what appears to be the general opinion of the Colony, viz., that the present generation of Colonists ought not to be deprived of the advantages referred to, while it cannot of course be expected to defray the entire cost of works of a permanent and reproductive character; and that, consequently, it will be expedient to raise, on the exhaustion of the existing assets, a moderate loan, not much exceeding the revenue of a single year. This question will not have to be decided in its details during the present Session; but I desire to elicit the opinion of the Council on the principle involved.

8. The Estimates for 1884 have been already voted. The Estimates for 1885 will be laid before you in next November; which seems to be the most generally convenient period for the opening of the annual Session.

9. With regard to Legislative measures;—The following Ordinances, among others, have already become law since I assumed this Government in the spring of last year, viz.: Ordinances to provide for the better Regulation of Vehicles and Public Traffic; To organise the construction of certain lines of Tramways; To constitute a Sanitary Board; To amend the Merchant Shipping Law and provide for the enforcement of Quarantine; To continue the operation of the French Mail Steamers Ordinance; To authorise the construction of certain Piers and Wharves. The principal Bills which will be laid before you during the present session will be the following:—

- (1.) To regulate Weights and Measures.
- (2.) To consolidate and amend the Ordinances relating to Opium.
- (3.) To establish a Savings Bank.

- (4.) To consolidate and amend the laws relating to Stamp Duties.
- (5.) To provide for the Registration of Medical Practitioners.
- (6.) To regulate Prisons and Prisons Discipline.
- (7.) To amend the Dangerous Goods' Ordinance, 1873.
- (8.) To amend the Preservation of Birds' Ordinance, 1870.
- (9.) To amend certain Ordinances relating to Criminal Procedure.
- (10.) To amend the law relating to the punishment of criminals.
- (11.) To amend the Bankruptcy Ordinance of 1864.
- (12.) To regulate the Post Office and Postal Service.
- (13.) To amend Ordinance No. 10 of 1867.
- (14.) To provide for the more effectual protection of Chinese female children.

10. The report of the Commission on Smuggling; and an able and exhaustive memorandum by Mr. Justice RUSSELL on the so-called Blockade of Hongkong by Chinese Revenue Cruisers are recommended to your attention. I have discussed this important question with the present British Minister at Peking, who will, I am confident, lend his aid towards carrying out an equitable settlement.

11. Turning to the vital subject of the Public Health, I am glad to inform you that the recent organisation of a Government Sanitary Board under Ordinance No. 7 of 1883, and the promulgation of new Rules and Regulations under that Ordinance, together with the introduction of improved contracts for the removal and disposal of waste products, have been followed by a marked improvement in the practical sanitation of the Colony. Much however remains to be done, both in respect of legislation and of structural sanitary work; but I am confident that the necessary reforms and improvements will in due course be effected by the zeal and ability of the officers to whom this branch of the Public Service has been entrusted, and by the cheerful acquiescence of all classes of our population in such measures and restrictions for the safety of the Public Health as may, with your assistance, become law. In this connection, Bills are in course of preparation to amend and consolidate the laws relating to the Public Health; to amend the Building Ordinance No. 8 of 1856; to regulate the Water supply, and to prevent waste. Owing however to the large and comprehensive nature of these Bills, no less than to the probable necessity of referring certain technical points to scientific authorities in England, it is possible that there may not be time for their full consideration during the present session. In this event, they will form the subject of your first deliberations in the next session. In the meantime, however, the carrying out of such works as were deemed of immediate importance to the Public Health has been sanctioned. These works, which are either in progress or in course of immediate initiation, include, among others, the Reclamation of unhealthy tidal lands at Yau-ma-Ti and Causeway Bay; Extensions and improvements of the existing system of sewers in this city; the construction of a new Central Market; the erection of a permanent Lazaretto on Stone Cutters' Island; the systematic dredging of the noxious foreshore along the Praya by means of steam machinery; and the general Sanitation of the villages in the Colony.

12. In connection with Sanitary Reform, the serious question of increased house accommodation for the population of Victoria is now engaging the attention of my Government. While every succeeding census has revealed a great increase in the population, there has not been a corresponding increase in the number of human habitations. Overcrowding in its worst form has consequently been the result; and the prevention of this evil will be dealt with in the proposed new Public Health Ordinance. However, as the true remedy is to be found chiefly in increased house accommodation for the labouring classes, it will be necessary to expand the City in a westerly direction as well as towards the East; and to create fresh building sites available for new tenements. Estimates will, therefore, be presented to you for certain additional works of reclamation; for the formation of new suburbs, and for the laying out of new streets in the Districts of Belcher's Bay and Causeway Bay.

13. As the hitherto existing system by which purchasers of Crown leaseholds have been able to evade their building obligations has led to a considerable area of land in and near the City remaining vacant, directions have been given that, in the future, no purchaser of a Crown allotment shall receive his lease until he shall have complied with the Conditions of the Sale, and expended the specified sum upon proper tenements. Moreover, in the villages of the Colony, the system of tenants-at-will (termed licensed squatters) whose tenures were terminable upon one month's notice, will be superseded by an improved system of small and inexpensive building leaseholds for seventy-five years. The inhabitants will thus gain that security for the investment of their money in suitable homes which was altogether wanting under their present Squatter's License, by which they were liable to eviction upon one month's notice. These measures will, it is expected, tend to stimulate the further erection of proper dwellings, and to relieve the present overcrowded condition of several quarters of the City.

14. On sanitary and other grounds I have come to the conclusion that the drainage of the marshy lands situated within the Race-Course in the Wong-nei Chung Valley is as much a work of necessity as the reclamation of Causeway Bay. A plan will, therefore, be laid before you for the drainage of these meadows and for their conversion into a Public Park.

15. Adverting to other important public undertakings, which have received legislative sanction, I am glad to inform you that the Break-water at Causeway Bay, intended to form a harbour of refuge for the boat population during typhoons, has been satisfactorily completed within the amount originally estimated; that the Taitam Water-works are steadily progressing; as is also the extension of the Government Hospital, together with the new Lunatic Asylum; and that the erection of the new Central School will be commenced forthwith. The new Meteorological Observatory has been finished; and will, it is expected, prove of practical value to the maritime interests of commerce.

16. I have pressed on the Imperial Government the importance, on Sanitary and other grounds, of that urgently needed improvement, the connection of the Eastern and Western portions of Victoria, by means of a continuous marine embankment along the sea-frontage of the Military Cantonments and the Royal Naval Yard. I hope to be able ere long to announce a favourable decision.

17. With regard to the vital question of Public Instruction, the Report of the Inspector of Schools for 1883 will be laid before you. I have myself visited on several occasions, among the other Public Establishments, the chief Educational Institutions in this Island. Their condition is generally satisfactory. The new Central School, or Victoria College, is much needed, and will provide accommodations for at least seven hundred students.

18. In connection with this subject, the Government proposes, with your concurrence, to follow the precedent of other Colonies by sending, in alternate years, in accordance with Regulations which will be submitted to you, two of the most promising students of our chief Colleges, selected by competitive examination, to complete their professional education in England, especially in Law, Medicine, and Civil Engineering.

19. Those minor posts in the Public Service which are at the disposal of the Governor, were wisely thrown open by my predecessor to competitive examination, without distinction of race or creed. A much needed stimulus has thus been given to general Education, while the Government will secure a constant supply of eligible candidates for the several Departments.

20. A Report will be laid before you showing the considerable progress already made in the afforestation of this Colony. I have directed the introduction of several thousand plants of the Australian *Eucalyptus*, a tree which furnishes valuable timber, and also exercises a marked sanitary influence, as experience in many tropical and semi-tropical countries has amply proved.

21. You will perceive from papers on the table that it has been necessary to procure a new supply of arms for the Police; for the care of which, and for the proper drill and instruction of the corps you have already made provision.

22. The Imperial Government, on my recommendation, has presented a full equipment of guns and rifles to the Hongkong Volunteer Artillery; which body, it is hoped, will furnish a valuable addition to the numerical strength of the garrison.

23. I have represented to the Imperial Government in strong terms the necessity of completing the Fortifications of this important Naval and Military Station and Mart of Commerce. Without referring to the value of the other and manifold interests, both Imperial and Colonial, which are at stake, I may remind you that Official Statistics show that the tonnage of the shipping entered at the Port of Hongkong in the year 1883 exceeded five millions of tons; that is, it exceeded the tonnage

of the shipping entered at the Port of London in 1843, the year in which Hong-kong was annexed to the British Crown, at a period when this island was little more than a barren rock, uninhabited save by a few Chinese pirates and fishermen.

24. I have now, Honourable gentlemen, referred to the principal subjects which will be submitted for your consideration during the present Session. Governors and Legislatures should speak by their actions; and it is my confident hope that our united efforts will, by the blessing of Divine Providence, promote the general welfare and prosperity of all races and classes in this Colony.

G. F. BOWEN.