

(No. 27.)



1869.

TASMANIA.

NAVAL DEFENCES.

DESPATCH FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

Laid upon the Table by the Colonial Treasurer, and ordered by the House to be printed, August 24, 1869.



TASMANIA.
(Circular.)

Downing-street, 26th January, 1869.

SIR,

I TRANSMIT to you, for your information, the copy of a correspondence with Mr. Fitzherbert, the Colonial Treasurer of New Zealand, upon the subject of a suggestion made by him respecting the Naval Defence of the Australian Colonies.

I have the honor to be,
Sir,

Your most obedient humble Servant,

GRANVILLE.

Governor DU CANE.

MR. FITZHERBERT to the DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.

(Copy.)

21 Cockspur-street, S.W., 27th November, 1868.

MY LORD DUKE,

I HAVE transmitted certain Memoranda for the consideration of your Grace relating to subjects which I was instructed to bring under the notice of the Home Government, and which have formed, more or less, the subject of conversation at the interviews with which I have been favored.

As my stay in this Country is drawing to a close, I venture to press for a decision on the points thus submitted to your attention.

Outside, however, the limited request of the Colony of New Zealand for assistance towards the protection of its harbours, as preferred in the Memorandum on Defence, there is a much larger view of the subject of external defence; and as it is one of great importance, no less to the Mother Country than the Australian Colonies, I should, as I conceive, but inadequately discharge my duty if I failed to bring it under your consideration. I refer to the Naval Defence of the Australasian Colonies.

It is probable that, in the case of war with any maritime power, one of the first points of attack would be the gold traffic between England and her gold-producing Colonies. That would, in fact, offer the greatest war prizes. It is, I believe, known as a fact that, a few years ago, the Russian Fleet at Petropolowski was prepared to make a descent upon the Australian Colonies. I need not dwell upon the consequences to English Commerce of the sudden stoppage of the great trade now carried on between the two Countries, and of that regular influx of gold which sustains, in no insignificant degree, the buoyancy of the English money market; nor need I dwell upon the vast injury to British Shipping which must result from the breaking up the Australasian trade. I will not attempt to measure the amount of such a disaster to the Colonies. The Mother Country is, I venture to assume, deeply interested herself in averting such a calamity. The question is, what steps would ordinary prudence suggest?

Feeble isolated efforts made by individual Colonies to protect their own Harbours and Coasts are obviously inadequate to meet the requirements of the case. Without presuming to question the wisdom of the proposal of Victoria to maintain a Ship of War for the defence of Port Philip, it still does appear to me to be, I will not say a profitless, but at all events an insufficient measure,

unless designed to form a part of some comprehensive system of Naval Defence. Every Seaport must, of course, be defended in the best way which the special circumstances and formation of the harbour indicate. But the Naval Defence of the Australasian Colonies, each and all, can only be secured upon the open sea by a Fleet under Imperial command, capable of guarding not merely the safety of the Colonial Coast, but the free passage round Cape Horn. What is wanted is a special Naval Station in the South Pacific, under an Imperial Officer with an independent Command.

The attention of former Governments of New Zealand has been turned to the subject, and approximate estimates of cost have been made. A Naval Officer of high rank roughly estimated the cost of maintaining an efficient Squadron in those seas at £500,000 a year. It was suggested that such an amount of outlay would be prudently incurred in the nature of an Insurance on the Capital protected; and that the cost might be equitably borne in equal proportions between the Mother Country and the Australasian Colonies under a federal arrangement—the Mother Country providing Ships and munitions of war.

The following figures will show the large dimensions which the interests sought to be protected have now attained. The value of the total Australasian Trade may be stated at about Sixty millions a year, one half of which is with Great Britain direct, and employs about 300,000 tons of British Shipping.

But even these figures will not be a fair measure of the value of the Commerce unless it be borne in mind that the trade is a rapidly increasing one.

The working out of such a measure would involve details into which it would be premature to enter. All that I can at present venture to do is very earnestly to draw the attention of the Home Government to the question as one of unusual interest and importance.

I have, &c.,

(Signed) WILLIAM FITZHERBERT.

His Grace the DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM & CHANDOS.

SIR F. ROGERS to MR. FITZHERBERT.

(Copy.)

Downing-street, 16th January, 1869.

SIR,

EARL GRANVILLE has had under his consideration your letter of the 27th November addressed to his predecessor, suggesting that the Naval Defence of the Australasian Colonies should be undertaken by a Fleet under Imperial Command, the cost to be borne in equal proportions between the Mother Country and the Colonies under a federal arrangement.

His Lordship considers that the suggestion is one which it would be unavailing to discuss unless there were sufficient reason to suppose that it would be practically taken up in the Colonies concerned.

It is very desirable that the Colonies should bear a part of the cost of their Naval Defence. With this view the Act 28 Victoria, Cap. 14, was passed; and the Colony of Victoria is likely to avail itself of the powers conferred by that Act on Colonial Governments and the Admiralty. But, inasmuch as it appears that the present Squadron on the Australian Station is maintained at a cost of £70,000 a year only, Lord Granville does not think it probable that the very great increase to the Naval Force contemplated by you would be sanctioned by Parliament in time of peace, even if a contribution of £250,000 a year were made by the Colonies.

His Lordship, however, will send copies of this correspondence to the Governors of the Australian Colonies and New Zealand for their information.

I am, &c.

(Signed) F. ROGERS.

WILLIAM FITZHERBERT, *Esq.*