

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18TH, 1876.

THE defence of the colony is rather an important matter, but, at the eleventh hour, it has been submitted for the consideration of the Assembly. Of course the House cannot discuss it, because it is too late. It so happens that it is not likely that England and Russia will be in a state of war, but it might have been otherwise, and so the neglect of the Government to deal with the matter is not likely to be productive of any serious results, for which we have to thank circumstances and not the Government. But adequate arrangements must be made for the defence of the colony, and so the subject ought to form the subject of discussion although nothing can be done during the present session. The Government has laid before the House the opinion of the Commodore of the Australian squadron, which is that of a naval commander, and, therefore, not that of an expert. It always happens that when some Imperial officer comes to Australia he is put forward as the best exponent of the course that should be pursued to protect the colony from the incursions of a naval squadron or the more serious attack of a military force. It appears to be the kind of deference which it is proper to show to the gentlemen holding, so far as Australia is concerned, a high Imperial commission. The present Commodore seems to have been reluctant to express any decided opinion upon the question submitted to him, but having no escape he has felt it necessary to say something, and has said it to the best of his ability, and to that extent the colony is indebted to his courtesy. Were General BURGoyNE alive, however, and should Colonel SCRATCHLEY observe what has been done, they would be somewhat amused at the course that has been taken, because both of them have expressed an opinion much more authori-

pressed an opinion much more authoritative than Commodore HOSKINS has expressed or would pretend to express. But it must be said that, considering the difficulties under which the Commodore labored, he has given very good advice, and that which common sense would dictate. Colonel SCRATCHLEY insisted that an effective defence of the Heads was very difficult, and he therefore assumed that an enemy's vessels would be able to effect the passage, and that they must be met there where they could not pass, Hobson's Bay. Since his report was published the torpedo has become an effective instrument for the defence of seaports, and Commodore HOSKINS, therefore, suggests that provision should be made for the utilisation of the new force for the defence of the Heads. Having regard to this change, he suggests that batteries of considerable power should

be constructed to prevent the removal of the torpedoes, but he says nothing about the military force that would be requisite to hold the batteries to prevent their removal. So far as he goes, we know by the proceedings adopted in Europe for the defence of harbors that he is quite right in attaching importance to torpedoes, because they are not only a danger to the aggressive Power, but, by impeding its operations, afford land batteries a better opportunity of assailing it. He recognises, too, that with regard to which there can be no doubt—that the rapidity of the current at the Heads renders it impossible to place stationary torpedoes. So far as his knowledge extended we have received from Commodore HOSKINS all the information that we had a right to expect from him, and it would be quite unfair to complain that this information is

to complain that this information is inadequate. But the Government—which rightly enough perceives the limitation of the Commodore's opinion—proposes to adopt it, whilst supplementing it by obtaining the services of a military engineer. And here we may say that Mr ROBERTSON, the Premier of New South Wales, and Sir JAMES M'CULLOCH, the Premier of Victoria, have agreed that the Imperial Government should be requested to send out Sir WILLIAM JERVOIS, apparently entirely ignorant of the fact that he is not available, inasmuch as he is the Governor of the Straits Settlements, and took that course with regard to the independent Malay Rajahs, which obtained him a rap over the knuckles from Earl CARNARVON. We trust that our allusion to the fact may prevent them making themselves ridiculous in the eyes of the Colonial Office. Sir JAMES M'CULLOCH proposes to obtain another vessel of the class of the Cerberus, but more powerful, and torpedoes, as recommended by Commodore HOSKINS, but to leave the question of the land forces in abeyance till he has obtained the services of a military engineer, which is simply absurd. The matter must be treated as a whole, the sea and land defences being inseparable. The English Press affords a full opportunity of understanding the question of the defence of ports. Commodore HOSKINS admits that the current in the narrows renders the employment of stationary torpedoes impossible. The defence of the German ports includes stationary torpedoes; and those that can be projected, combined with shore batteries. Projected torpedoes, or torpedo vessels, are yet only in their infancy, and the assumption, therefore, that they with land batteries would be sufficient for the defence of Port Phillip Bay is quite absurd. Sir JAMES M'CULLOCH, reiterating the remarks made in the public prints, says that we have ex-

public prints, says that we have expended two millions on the defences, and have got nothing for it. Should the Assembly agree to his proposals we shall only perpetuate the blunder. Nothing can be done except by procuring the best arms and an ample supply of the munitions of war, till an officer of Imperial Engineers has reported on the question of the defences. A month since the condition of affairs in Europe was such that it was necessary to take some immediate steps for the defence of the colony. Since then everything has changed. The Eastern question has been submitted for the decision of a Conference which is absolutely certain to maintain peace, and it is, therefore, absurd to ask the Assembly to vote money in a hurry for that with regard to which there is no immediate necessity. There can be no war now that the Conference is sitting, because it means the union of forces in favor of the preservation of peace which Russia cannot resist. We do not expect Sir JAMES M'CULLOCH to see this, but probably the House will.

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