

may be extended, if our means permit, to some approach towards coast patrol. I do not say coast defence, because that would imply a size and character of ship which our finances, I fear, will hardly be able to afford for a long time to come.

In regard to the very judicious remarks you have made with reference to the question of manning, for my own part, I quite realise the wisdom of associating any local force which we may develop in the closest possible manner with the Navy. Of the efficiency of the Navy and the quality of its officers and men we have, from personal experience, in times of peace it is true, but still from prolonged experience, the highest possible opinion. Every confidence is felt in Australia both in British ships and British sailors, and no doubt is entertained of their capacity to give the best possible account of themselves when the time of trial actually arrives. But we also recognise that the Navy as a fighting machine is only kept in its condition of efficiency by the constant maintenance, even in the lowest ranks of the Service, of the highest state of training. We appreciate the discipline and training which our men have received in the squadron, and anticipate in the future that, by similar means, by association with the Navy, we shall be assisted to keep our local vessels, whatever they may be, up to its high standard. We shall not be willing in any way to accept for ourselves any less degree of proficiency than that which His Majesty's Navy enjoys, and by which its reputation has been established. A force, small as ours must be, would enjoy few, if any, opportunities of advancement for officers and men if it were a completely isolated service. On the contrary, it has everything to gain by being kept in the closest possible touch with the Navy, and with all advances as they are being made in Naval tactics or training. If, therefore, our partner, New Zealand, is able to devise what would be to them a satisfactory scheme of local defence, or make some amended agreement with yourselves, I believe the Parliament of the Commonwealth would desire to terminate the present agreement, to set free the ships of the squadron from any obligations at present imposed, and to devote our funds to the provision of a local force. The agreement, as you properly observed, is tripartite, and requires the consent of New Zealand as well as that which you have given. I quite recognise that. I have made no appeal to my friend, Sir Joseph Ward, either in public or in private on this head, because I felt it was a matter which he required to consider independently. As he knows, I have made him no suggestion on this topic of any kind whatever. But I say it will be a source of gratification to us if his Parliament terminates this agreement in order to follow, so far as New Zealand is concerned, whatever course it may think best. For our part, Lord Tweedmouth, your overture will be made known in the Commonwealth. Your words of counsel and approval will be very highly esteemed. We recognise this as a further step in the exercise of our self-governing powers with which are properly attached the responsibilities which can never be dissociated from them. Those responsibilities we have no desire to avoid; on the contrary we shall assume them with confidence in ourselves and in our cause, providing, so far as our means and population permit, a defence of the harbours of Australia, which will be an Imperial defence; it will not be the shipping owned in Australia alone that will enjoy the protection of our ships and forts; it will not be commerce especially Australian that will be protected by this harbour defence; but of course the same protection will be secured by these means for all British shipping and cargoes. The necessary supplies, the necessary coal, either for the mercantile marine or for your vessels of war, will there be under safe shelter and always at hand. All the stores required to maintain the Naval force while it is in our waters would be safe in time of war. These, I take it, are no mean steps towards the protection

Thirteenth Day.

8 May 1907.

NAVAL DEFENCE.

(Mr. Deakin.)