

3d. March 1866.

4. I regret I am unable to furnish accurate statistics to refute the statement that the Chinese and Indian population "contribute in a very small proportion to the general revenue," but I fully agree with the remarks made by the Chief Magistrate of this district in a letter, copy of which I enclose, that a very large share of the taxation is borne by these two races.

5. As regards the one object of the petition—the desire for union of this Colony and Vancouver Island,—I am convinced from the information I received during my recent tour in the interior, that the people of the upper country care little whether there be union of the Colonies, or continued separation, and a petition of opposite effect to the one now forwarded would be signed by at least an equal number of the resident population.

I have, &c.

The Right Hon. Edward Cardwell, M.P.,
&c. &c. &c.

(Signed) ARTHUR N. BIRCH.

Enclosure 1 in No. 15.

Encl. 1 in
No. 15.

To Her Most Gracious Majesty, Victoria, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and the Colonies thereunto belonging, Defender of the Faith, &c., &c.

The humble Petition of the undersigned Merchants, Miners, Traders, Farmers, Packers, and others resident in British Columbia.

Humbly sheweth:

That your petitioners having expended a very large amount of capital and labour in exploring and developing the resources of the Colony, are deeply interested in its welfare and success.

That in the absence of any reasonable expectations of a commensurate increase in the population or in the wealth of the country, to justify new burdens, they view with alarm the great increase in the amount of taxation proposed to be raised this year.

That your petitioners estimate the resident population of British Columbia during the winter months, exclusive of the Chinese and Indian, who contribute in a very small proportion to the general revenue, at about 4,000 persons, and the summer population, leaving the Kootenay district out of calculation, regarding which they have no accurate information, at about 7,000 persons, and by averaging these figures, they arrive at 5,500 as the mean population of the country.

In making any calculation of revenue or population, they are led to look upon the prospects of Kootenay as too problematical to be taken into consideration in allotting the average share of the general revenue which will be required from each individual resident in the older districts. There may be, for a week or two, 3,000 or 4,000 persons at these mines, and there may not be as many hundreds a few weeks later. Again, the licence fees and duties collected at the boundary line may give a handsome surplus, or they may not exceed the expenses incurred in collection.

That the revenue of British Columbia from ordinary sources is estimated at 153,615*l.*, or 27*l.* 18*s.* 6*d.* per head, as against 110,877*l.* in 1863, when the mean population could not have been less than 6,500 persons, the number of licence fees issued to free miners in that year being 4,066, consequently the proportion of taxation falling upon each individual did not exceed 17*l.* 12*s.*

The total receipts for the present year, in aid of revenue, including balance of loan for making roads, bridges, and streets, are estimated at 230,255*l.*, and the expenditure for 1865 is estimated at 240,525*l.*, or 43*l.* 14*s.* 7½*d.*, while that of 1863 was only 147,598*l.*, and allowing for the more numerous population, was only at the rate of 22*l.* 14*s.* 1¾*d.*, or slightly more than one-half.

That this great increase in the burdens of a young country already heavily taxed, and with a reduced population, must necessarily fall injuriously on the miner, who has to labour in the most inhospitable region of the Colony. Further, the climate of Cariboo is such that general mining operations are confined to about four months in the year; and it is only from the profits of this short season that the miner can accumulate the means of living during the winter, and providing funds to meet the demands which the Government makes upon him in the forms of a tariff, road tolls, licence, recording, and other fees, and a heavy tax upon his gold.

That while your petitioners are fully aware of their obligation to contribute towards the support of the Government which affords them protection, and which they have hitherto done without complaint, they cannot help expressing their conviction that so large an increase of expenditure as is contemplated this year under the head of civil list, &c., is out of all proportion to the number of the producing population. The total amount of salaries, &c., voted in 1865 being 42,317*l.*, against 28,590*l.* in 1863, and with the further sum of 4,825*l.* for travelling expenses, the total for this year is over 47,000*l.*

That your petitioners believe that there are gold fields of vast wealth within the boundaries of British Columbia undiscovered, and which will employ a large population in their development, but these will require energy, industry, and enterprise to bring to light, and your petitioners believe that when added to the natural difficulties, there are fresh, unnecessary, and vexatious taxes imposed upon the miners who are the mainstay of the country, this industrious class will become discouraged and turn their steps to the neighbouring gold fields of Washington territory, Oregon, and California.

That your petitioners are fully convinced of the necessity of legislative union between British Columbia and Vancouver Island, on fair and equitable terms. That the accomplishment of this event as soon as practicable is an indispensable requisite for the progress and prosperity of both.

The following are some of the reasons which have led your petitioners to take this view of the relative position of the two Colonies:—

The mean population of the Colony of Vancouver Island cannot be computed at less than 7,500