

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.—No. 335.

The following Report of the Insanitary Properties Commission, which was laid before the Legislative Council on the 25th instant, is published.

By Command,

T. SERCOMBE SMITH,
Acting Colonial Secretary.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 26th July, 1898.

REPORT.

1. We met on the 6th August, 1896, and 12th February, 31st March, 29th April, and 5th June, 1897, and examined the following witnesses:—

Dr. FRANCIS W. CLARK, Medical Officer of Health.

The Honourable F. A. COOPER, Director of Public Works.

Mr. W. DANBY,

Mr. R. K. LEIGH, } Architects and Civil Engineers practising in the Colony.

Mr. C. PALMER, }

2. In order to report on the details set forth in the Commission, insanitary buildings have been classified as follows:—

(a) Back-to-back houses.

(b) Houses fronting on narrow lanes.

(c) Houses with insufficient open space in the rear; and

(d) Houses abutting on the hill-side.

3. We have personally inspected 19 houses in eleven different streets and lanes in the Colony and we have had before us and carefully considered certain reports and statements (Appendices Nos. 7, 9, and 12) compiled for our information by the Honourable FRANCIS A. COOPER, late Director of Public Works, and Dr. FRANCIS W. CLARK, Medical Officer of Health.

4. We regret to have to report that there are many insanitary properties in the Colony, and dwellings which, in their present condition, are unfit for human habitation. The back portions of a number of the houses visited by us are dark, ill ventilated, extremely dirty, and in some cases mere dens of filth. The interior of the cubicles or sub-divisions of the living rooms was such that in the great majority of cases their contents could be seen only by the aid of an artificial light.

We wish to call particular attention to the tabulated statement of the Medical Officer of Health (Appendix No. 12) in which he states that in the Health Districts Nos. 5 and 6 out of a total of 3,095 Chinese houses only 565 can be said to be in a fairly good sanitary condition. He further states that the balance 2,530 are insanitary and have been classed into A., B., C., D., and their various defects are shewn therein. In the other health districts of the Colony, it appears from his evidence that a similar unsatisfactory state of affairs exists. The Medical Officer of Health in his Annual Report for 1896 shews that 3,095 houses in the said districts represent 8,700 separate dwellings and embrace a population of about seventy-two thousand inhabitants.

5. We are of opinion that there is no need for the resumption of any large proportion of these properties. The alterations and improvements we are about to recommend will, in our opinion, render by far the greater number of them fit for habitation. Resumption is only necessary where properties are so divided and sub-divided that it would be difficult or impossible to get the several owners to agree on any combined plan for the improvement of the dwellings, or where the lots of land are so small and the buildings on them of such dimensions that to make the needful improvements in them as they stand would leave the existing houses more or less useless for all practical purposes. Mr. LEIGH, in his evidence, calls attention to such properties in Hillier Street, &c. Should resumption become necessary in any of the cases indicated, the areas affected will probably be small, and the expenditure required could, no doubt, be easily met out of ordinary revenue. We have to recommend that the Ordinance enabling the Government to resume insanitary properties should be amended in the sense of the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, in force in England so as to allow of deductions being made on account of illegal rents, insanitary conditions, &c., &c. when assessing compensation. Any such resumptions as may be necessary, and some will be, if the Colony is to be put in a thoroughly sanitary condition, can be carried out so that there will be no need for any extensive removals of the inhabitants, and therefore the question of housing the displaced population

hardly arises. We are of opinion, as to the great majority of insanitary dwellings, that they can be rendered fairly sanitary and fit for habitation by the enforcement of the following recommendations, as the principal defects in the existing buildings arise from want of adequate light and ventilation.

Class A. Back-to-back Houses.

6. Where these houses have each a greater total depth than 26 feet from front to back one-half of the entire space intervening between the principal rooms and the enclosing walls at the back of the premises on each floor should be open to the sky, severe penalties should be inflicted on any one closing or allowing said space to be closed and the Magistrate should have full power to order the prompt removal of the obstructions.

Where in back-to-back houses over 26 feet in depth there is now no space between the principal rooms and the enclosing walls at the back of the premises the land-owner should be compelled by law to so alter the construction of his house as to provide for an open space at the back of not less than 40 square feet.

Wherever there is now, or wherever there is to be constructed under the recommendations contained herein, an open space at the back of any house, a window not less than one-thirtieth of the floor area must be opened into it from the back of the main room.

These regulations should not apply to houses situate at the corner of two main streets, and adequately lighted from two sides.

Class B. Houses fronting on narrow lanes.

7. In houses fronting streets less than 15 feet in width, no cubicles should be allowed on the ground floors.

Class C. Houses with insufficient open space in the rear.

8. One-half of the entire space intervening between the principal rooms and the enclosing walls at the back of the premises on each floor should be open to the sky such space not to be less than forty square feet in any case.

Class D. Houses abutting on the hill-side.

9. One-half of the entire space intervening between the principal rooms and the hill-side against which the premises abut should be open to the sky such space not to be less than forty square feet in any case.

10. We are of opinion that the provisions of Section 9 of Ordinance No. 15 of 1894 are sufficient for the purposes of abating overcrowding.

11. We are of opinion that immediate effect should be given to these recommendations by legislation.

12. We consider that no cubicles should, in future, be permitted on any floor in any dwelling that has not a window or windows opening directly into the external air of a total area of not less than one-tenth of the floor space.

13. In his examination the Medical Officer of Health referred to the question of cubicles and suggested their reduction from the present height of eight feet to six feet, but in this he is not supported by the other witnesses the local architects being averse to any change as the present height was decided upon so recently as 1894. We, however, recommend that no cubicles of a greater height than seven feet unless the height of the room exceeds thirteen feet be permitted to be erected or re-erected hereafter in any domestic dwelling.

14. We recommend that owners of Private Streets and Lanes be required at their own expense to surface, channel, and light such Streets and Lanes, and to maintain them in a sanitary condition.

15. In conclusion, we now deal *seriatim* with the questions referred for our consideration in the order set forth in the Commission.

We are of opinion—

- (i) That it is unnecessary for the Government to resume insanitary properties generally, and improve them and re-sell them.
- (ii) It being unnecessary to resume insanitary properties generally, no means for their resumption need be provided.
- (iii) The said properties should be improved in the manner suggested in this Report, and should be carried out by the owners at their own cost, failing which they should be carried out by the Government, and the owners called upon to refund the cost.
- (iv) It is not necessary to provide means for housing the occupants of any dwellings pending improvements, as such improvements could be carried out without any undue inconvenience to such occupants.

- (v) As the improvements will be carried out at the cost of the owners of the properties, no capital will be required for resumption and improvements except in those cases where the making of such improvements may result in absorbing so much of the land as to leave the remainder so small or of such a form as to yield but poor return to the owner. In such cases it may become necessary for the Crown to resume; but such cases we are informed, on the authority of the Director of Public Works, will be extremely rare.

16. In support of the necessity for the above recommendations we would beg a careful reference to the following reports in which the urgent attention of the Government has been for many years and is again earnestly directed to the great depth of the bulk of the Chinese houses as compared with their width to the want of open space in the rear thereof, and to the consequent serious defects in the lighting and ventilation of such buildings. We desire to call special attention to Mr. Chadwick's reports of 1882 and 1890 and to the plans and drawings contained in the former.

(i) The Colonial Surgeon's reports dated Hongkong, 15th April, 1874, and 5th April, 1875, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 25th August, 1881.

(ii) Mr. Osbert Chadwick's report on the Sanitary Condition of Hongkong presented to both Houses of Parliament in August, 1882, more particularly paras. 149-154. Mr. Chadwick's reports dated 1st July, 1890.

(iii) The report of the Permanent Committee of the Sanitary Board dated 29th June, 1894.

(iv) The reports of the Committee on Housing the Chinese dated Hongkong, 28th July, and 13th August, 1894.

(v) The Colonial Surgeon's letter dated Hongkong 2nd March, 1895, forwarding to Government the letter and report of the Medical Officer in charge of Epidemic Hospital and Acting Superintendent of Government Civil Hospital, &c., on the Epidemic of Bubonic Plague dated Hongkong 1st March, 1895.—(the letter in question and paras. 149-153 of Mr. Chadwick's report of 1882 will be found in Appendices Nos. 14 and 14 (a));

(vi) The report of the Medical Officer of Health for the year 1896; and

(vii) The tabulated statement of the Medical Officer of Health (Appendix No. 12) which shews that no more than about 18% of the Chinese dwellings in the City of Victoria can be regarded as "in a fairly good sanitary condition."

C. P. CHATER.

T. JACKSON.

T. H. WHITEHEAD. } See further recommend-
N. J. EDE. } ations at foot hereof.

I agree with the above Report, with the exception that I am of opinion that paragraph 7 thereof should read as follows:—

7.—*In houses fronting on narrow lanes less than 15 feet in width, no cubicles should be allowed on any floor.*

J. H. STEWART LOCKHART,
Chairman.

Note.—Paragraph 7: We are of opinion that this should read as follows:—

7.—*In houses fronting on narrow lanes less than 15 feet in width, no cubicles whatever should be allowed on any floor, and in houses fronting on lanes and streets of over that width no cubicles should be allowed on the ground floor without the permission of the Sanitary Board.*

To paragraph 13 we desire to add:—

We are further of opinion that no cubicles erected or to be re-erected in future shall be placed nearer than six feet to any window the area of which is included in calculating the required window area of one-tenth of the floor area.

We also desire to add the following:—

17.—*Upon mature consideration we strongly recommend that the further erection of dwelling-houses of a greater depth than 30 feet, which cannot be ventilated and lighted on each floor from the back as well as from the front, should be absolutely prohibited and such ventilation should be provided by means of an open space, or yard, of an area not less than one-eighth of the area occupied by the building.*

T. H. WHITEHEAD.
N. J. EDE.

HONGKONG, 9th March, 1898.