

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.—No. 466.

The following Report of the Alcoholic Liquors Commission is published.

By Command,

T. SERCOMBE SMITH,
Acting Colonial Secretary.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 11th October, 1898.

REPORT.

HONGKONG, 12th August, 1898.

We, the undersigned members of the Commission appointed on the 14th day of February, 1898, to enquire into and report on the importation into Hongkong, and the manufacture and sale in Hongkong of Alcoholic Liquors of all kinds and into the operation of the laws regulating the same, and to ascertain whether any and what descriptions of crude, inferior, adulterated, or deleterious liquors are manufactured, or sold and by whom and to what extent, and what measures may usefully be taken to improve the laws and to check the importation, manufacture, and sale in licensed houses and elsewhere of such crude, inferior, adulterated, or injurious liquors, have the honour to forward herewith the evidence * taken by us and our opinion thereon.

2. The Commission was appointed because there was a strong opinion in some quarters that deleterious liquors were being sold in the Colony, which were doing a great deal of mischief to soldiers and sailors. After the second meeting of the Commission on the 25th February, Mr. WODEHOUSE, Dr. HARTIGAN, and Mr. MCCALUM left the Colony, so, in order to complete the investigation, it was necessary to ask the Government to appoint others so as to enable a quorum of members to be present at the sittings of the Commission. Captain HASTINGS, R.N., was appointed a member and Chairman in place of Mr. WODEHOUSE, and the other two vacancies were not filled up. Subsequently, with but three members it was found to be impossible on two occasions to have a quorum present, so an additional member was asked for and Dr. F. O. STEDMAN was appointed.

3. With a view to obtaining the fullest information on the objects of this enquiry, questions were sent to the Deputy Inspector-General of Fleets and Hospitals, Hongkong, Colonel THE O'GORMAN, D.A.A.G., The Principal Medical Officer of H. M. FORCES, Hongkong, The Principal Civil Medical Officer, Hongkong, Mr. LAWFORD (Secretary to the Commodore), The Managers of the China Sugar Refinery, to all Chinese holders of Distillery Licences, and to one foreign Consul. It has been found necessary to examine two witnesses and to hold four meetings. In view of the reasons assigned for the sixty-seven cases of alcoholism that occurred during 1897 in the Government Civil Hospital we did not think it necessary to call the Principal Civil Medical Officer before the Commission.

4. At the first meeting on the 22nd February last, we requested the Secretary to draw up a report on the manufacture and composition of the Chinese liquors known as *samshu*, also to visit the Chinese distilleries and report upon the quality of the materials used.

5. As regards importation we have evidence that a quantity of cheap liquors are brought into this Colony. We have evidence also that because these liquors are cheap it does not follow that they must be made from crude, inferior, or decayed materials. Manufactured from good spirit there is a large profit on the liquors which are sold at 20 cents a bottle. Moreover, analysis has shown that these cheap liquors do not contain deleterious substances, but that they lack flavour, body, and aroma, and that they contain less fusel oil than genuine spirits. The tests to which liquors are subjected in the Government Laboratory are sufficiently severe to warrant the Government Analyst passing them as harmless, and this opinion is entirely supported by the medical evidence received by us and by the records of the amount of drunkenness in the Colony. There is no ground whatever for the assertion that there exist in Hongkong deleterious liquors of which a small quantity produces sudden and temporary insanity in the consumer or the appearance of having been drugged.

6. Patent-still spirit from the China Sugar Refinery, and the Chinese liquors known as *samshu* are the only liquors manufactured in Hongkong. The former is of good quality, and the composition of the principal Chinese liquors—*Leu Pun Chai*, *Sieung*

*Not printed here.

Ching Chau, and *Sam Ching Chau*—together with the knowledge from inspection that only sound materials are used in the *samshu* distilleries, is sufficient to justify our opinion that the effect of drinking these Chinese liquors is practically the same as that produced by whiskey of the same strength. The high proportion of compound ethers in *samshu* will afford a means of ascertaining its presence in liquors should it be suspected from its odour. Although *samshu* is the national drink of the Chinese, drunkenness amongst them is conspicuous by its absence.

7. It appears that a few years ago it was customary for beach-combers to frequent a place at the corner of Upper Lascar Row known as "Samshu Corner," and there to drink *samshu*, but no drinking in this quarter in recent years has been noticed.

8. There appear to be no grounds for dissatisfaction either with the general conduct of Hongkong public-houses or with the Police supervision of these houses. Drunkenness in this Colony amongst the European population is not in excess of the amount found in other ports and cities. The analysis of thirty-one samples of the cheapest liquors has shown that such liquors are not crude, inferior, or adulterated,* so that we fail to find that any evil whatever exists as regards the conduct of the liquor traffic of the Colony.

* Since the evidence of the Government Analyst was taken a number of samples have been submitted for analysis and four prosecutions have been instituted for adulteration (deficiency of strength).

9. It does not appear to us to be compatible with the public safety that *The Food and Drugs Ordinance, No. 18 of 1896*, should be a dead letter, and we recommend that steps be taken in order that largely increased numbers of samples may be examined in the Government Laboratory, so that as much as possible may be done to prevent the sale of any adulterated or deleterious liquors.

10. As all the evidence collected has shown that the drunkenness here is due to the quantity and not to the quality of the liquor consumed, we are of opinion that the cheapness of liquor is conducive to the increase of drunkenness. As *samshu* is very cheap, legislation should be undertaken so that this liquor or any liquor containing *samshu* may not be sold either directly or indirectly to Europeans.

11. It is essential that the holders of public-house licences should be persons of good character, and as cases have occurred in which householders have been guarantors for a person wholly unfit to hold a licence, it is desirable that the fullest information should be obtained as to the character of the applicant for such a licence.

12. We are of opinion that the number (twenty-three) of public-houses now licensed in the Colony is amply sufficient for present needs.

We have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servants,

WM. C. H. HASTINGS,
Chairman.

JNO. J. FRANCIS, q.c. (*I desire to call special attention to Mr. Browne's evidence, p. 17 and the first sixteen lines of p. 18—another Analyst or Apothecary is sorely needed.*)

R. F. COBBOLD, M.A.

F. O. STEDMAN, M.D., B.S., London.

His Excellency Major-General WILSON BLACK, C.B.,
Acting Governor,
HONGKONG.

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.—No. 467.

The following Returns of Deaths are published.

By Command,

T. SERCOMBE SMITH,
Acting Colonial Secretary.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 15th October, 1898.