

HONGKONG.

## REPORT ON THE SUBJECT OF DESTITUTES.

*Presented to the Legislative Council by Command of  
His Excellency the Governor.*

HONGKONG, 1st May, 1885.

SIR,

The Committee appointed by His Excellency the Governor to enquire into the subject of Destitutes in this Colony have taken the various points referred to them into consideration, and beg to report as follows :

2. The Committee consider that Legislative measures are necessary to check the influx of destitutes, but that such measures can never be expected to get rid of the destitute class altogether. A proper organisation for dealing with such destitutes as must always present themselves in greater or less numbers will tend, the Committee think, to decrease rather than to increase destitution, as it will bring the men under observation, and will enable persistent measures to be taken to keep the Colony clear of them. The main evil to be overcome would seem to be the mistaken charity which finds its outcome in indiscriminate distribution of money to men who have no intention of working so long as they can prey on good-natured people.

3. The Committee consider that a Government Casual Ward should be instituted, and that it should be called simply the Shelter. There would appear to be no alternative but to attach it to the Gaol, where in fact such an institution has existed in embryo for many years. To complete the scheme of the Committee, a building will undoubtedly be necessary, but they recommend that the experiment be tried with existing means, until experience shows what amount of success is attainable and what accommodation would be required.

4. The Committee recommend that admission to this Shelter should be by printed ticket, space being left on each ticket for the name and a short description of the man relieved, which particulars the giver of the ticket would be requested to insert. In view, however, of the improbability that these details would be always or even often supplied, the Committee are not prepared to suggest that they should be made compulsory. Each ticket should cover board and lodging for 24 hours, and should not be transferable. Such tickets should be sold at the Treasury, in books of 20, the price of each book being \$3.

5. The Committee further recommend that, if it can be arranged at a moderate expense, permanent advertisements should be inserted in the Newspapers explaining this system, and dissuading benevolent persons from relieving destitutes with money.

6. Books of Tickets for free distribution should be furnished to the Harbour Master, the Captain Superintendent of Police, the Police Magistrates, and to other Heads of Departments, if they find it necessary to have them.

7. The Committee consider it essential that, after the first two days' residence by any destitute in the Shelter, it shall be within the discretion of the Superintendent of the Gaol to require him to perform a reasonable amount of moderate labour, as the condition of his obtaining further relief, time and opportunity being afforded him each day to look for employment. It would be understood also that habitual frequenters of the Shelter who shew no desire to get their living, or to leave the Colony, who will not work, or who are disorderly, should be charged before the Magistrates as rogues and vagabonds.

8. Lists of the men inhabiting the Shelter should be forwarded to the Shipping Office weekly.

9. It may be found necessary to keep a Register of the inmates of the Shelter, with dates of admission and discharge, &c. These details, however, will be best arranged as the scheme gradually grows into shape. The Visiting Justices of the Gaol would of course inspect the arrangements, and doubtless all necessary information as to the character and conduct of the men relieved would be given to persons with any reasonable ground for asking it.

10. The Committee consider that the arrangements suggested above will put it in the power of any charitable person at once to provide any destitute, at a merely nominal expense, with the necessaries of life. The class of professional idlers will doubtless very much prefer the old system of indiscriminate pecuniary relief. Charitable persons must therefore expect to be told frightful stories of the hardships endured in the Government Shelter. That it is in the Gaol, that the men are locked in, that they have to do the work that convicts do—all this will be urged in the hope of extorting the accustomed dollar to be spent in drink. If well-meaning but mistaken persons listen to these stories, and persist in throwing money away on men whose only desire is to be idle, the plan will be a failure; if not, it may be a success.

11. Until, however, the enquires which the Committee understand are being made at other ports are complete, and Legislative measures based on their results can be adopted, the suggestions of this Report can be regarded as tentative only.

The Committee have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servants,

A. LISTER,

*Treasurer.*

W. M. DEANE,

*Captain Supt. of Police.*

R. MURRAY RUMSEY,

*Ret. Com., R.N.,*

*Acting Harbour Master.*

A. FALCONER,

*Acting Supt., Victoria Gaol.*

ALFRED G. WISE,

*Acting Registrar.*

N. J. EDE.

D. R. CRAWFORD.

The Honourable W. H. MARSH, C.M.G.,  
*Colonial Secretary.*

*Report by the Superintendent of Victoria Gaol.*

---

VICTORIA GAOL,  
HONGKONG, 13th May, 1885.

I have perused and considered the Report of the Committee appointed by His Excellency the Governor to enquire into the subject of Destitutes in this Colony.

2. I am as yet so unfamiliar with the general conditions of the Colony that any observations of mine on the general scheme proposed would be useless, and I assume are not required.

3. As far as the suggestions made affect the Gaol administration, there seems to me to be no difficulty in carrying out the arrangements suggested.

4. It must be borne in mind however that the Gaol is already somewhat overcrowded, and may be more so, when it would become highly inconvenient to afford sleeping accommodation to such casuals. I think therefore it would be a much more satisfactory arrangement if sleeping accommodation for such destitutes could be provided elsewhere—perhaps a room for this purpose might be made available in the Police barracks—while their meals would be supplied to them in the Prison.

5. The suggestion in para. 7 that after two days' shelter destitutes should be made liable to work seems to me not sufficiently stringent, and I think it would be better to adopt the practice of English Casual Wards, that every able bodied person who obtains food and shelter should perform a moderate amount of work, say three hours work in the day. The plan proposed of giving two days food and lodging without exacting labour would perhaps tend rather to encourage the idle. Such persons would very likely accept food and shelter only for the two days during which no work was assigned them, and would then leave, to return again for another two days after a short interval.

A. GORDON,  
*Supt. Victoria Gaol.*