

Sir John Pope Hennessey, K.C.M.G., governor and commander-in-chief of Hong Kong on the Contagious Diseases Ordinance in that colony.

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SIR JOHN POPE HENNESSEY,

K.C.M.G.,

GOVERNOR AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

OF HONG KONG,

ON THE

CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ORDINANCE

IN THAT COLONY.

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ONE PENNY.

SIR JOHN POPE HENNESSEY
ON THE
CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ORDINANCE IN
HONG KONG.

ON THE 28th of July, 1882, His Excellency, Sir J. Pope Hennessey, received in London a large deputation of gentlemen interested in the Abolition of Licensed Vice and houses of ill-fame as exists in Hong Kong under the Acts known as the Contagious Diseases Ordinances of 1857 and 1867. After a memorial had been presented, thanking him for his services in exposing the system—

HIS EXCELLENCY, in reply, said:—The address which you have been good enough to present to me gives me of course very great satisfaction; but I venture to think that it ought also to give satisfaction to Her Majesty's Government. You represent a powerful portion of the public opinion of this country; and you have come to give your support to an official who has brought to the knowledge of the Government certain facts which had been concealed from the Government and from the people of England. I have not been able to do much, but I have been able to state the truth.

A Colonial Governor in dealing with a subject of this kind is under certain difficulties, but they are removed to a great extent when he receives the confidence and support of gentlemen like yourselves. I will illustrate the position in which a Colonial Governor stands, by reference to one or two points in the published Parliamentary history of the question. We have now got as a public document, the correspondence between the Secretary of State and myself, as to the working of these Acts in Hong Kong. And I find at page 33 of those despatches which have been laid before the House of Commons, and which I know that some of the members have studied, a despatch which I addressed to Lord Kimberly on the 5th June, 1880. I reported to Lord Kimberley that in dealing with a despatch of Sir Michael Hicks Beach I had come across a despatch of my predecessor, Governor Sir Arthur Kennedy, of the 4th of January, 1875, on the working of the Contagious Diseases Ordinance in Hong Kong, in which he observes that as similar laws are alleged by some persons in England to be practical failures, he forwards, for the Earl of Carnarvon's information, certain military returns and a statement of the Colonial Surgeon to the effect that there was "no case of syphilis contracted in Hong Kong in either the army or navy in the year 1874." In the same despatch Sir Arthur Kennedy states that "there has not been any complaint against the working of the Contagious Diseases Ordinance."



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I went on to say that as this appears to have been the only despatch written by my predecessor on the working of the Contagious Diseases Ordinance it might therefore be supposed that not merely was the year 1874 free from this disease, but that there was nothing in the returns of subsequent years to indicate that the Ordinance was in any way a practical failure.

Having, however, shown a copy of the despatch to the Colonial Surgeon, he informed me that "some terrible mistakes have been made." He said he could not explain how he could have misled the Governor into thinking that no case of syphilis had been contracted in Hong Kong in either the army or navy in 1874.

On referring to the returns on this subject that had been furnished by the naval and military authorities for the year 1874, the Colonial Surgeon admitted that the number of cases of syphilis contracted by the troops in Hong Kong in 1874 was nine, and the number of cases of syphilis contracted by the sailors of the Royal Navy in 1874 was 47.

The official returns show that the number of venereal cases admitted into the Royal Naval Hospital in 1874 was 85; in 1875, 177; and in 1876, 147. From a note furnished by the naval surgeons and appended to the returns, it appears that in 1874, 35 of these cases had been contracted in Hong Kong; in 1875, 95 had been contracted in Hong Kong, and in 1876, 85 cases had been contracted in the Colony.

The returns furnished by the military authorities, and printed on the same page, show that the admissions to the Military Hospital in Hong Kong for venereal diseases for those three years were as follows:—

Year.	Venereal Case.	Syphilis.
1874 - - -	65 - - -	12
1875 - - -	71 - - -	32
1876 - - -	94 - - -	26

To these military returns a note is appended stating that there was a change of regiments in the year 1876.

The returns show that in the year 1877 the number of soldiers admitted into hospital with venereal diseases was 130, and the number of sailors of the Royal Navy 230, but of the naval cases 82 are stated to have been contracted out of Hong Kong.

The Colonial Surgeon informed me that a misconception also appears in the statement that no complaint from any quarter was made against the working of the Contagious Diseases Ordinance. He said he himself made serious complaints to the Government on the subject in 1873 and 1874, and it also seems that complaints came from other quarters during that time, as well as before and since that time.

In justice to Sir Arthur Kennedy, I pointed out that in thus venturing to correct the report made to Lord Carnarvon on the 4th of January, 1875, those mistakes were made in relation to a subject not at all likely to attract much attention from the Head of the Executive, except when some grave public scandal occurs, such as was brought to my notice in October, 1877, by a Coroner's inquest.

You will therefore see that when I called on the official informant of my predecessor, to explain to me how it came to pass that he misled Sir Arthur Kennedy, and caused him to mislead Her Majesty's Government, his official explanation was—that "some terrible mistake had been made." Those are his words; and he says he cannot explain how he misled the Governor into thinking that no case of syphilis had been contracted in Hong Kong in 1874.

That despatch was written in January, 1875, but in the year 1874 there came before the Governor certain reports from the same Colonial Surgeon upon the state of the licensed brothels: on that report Sir Arthur Kennedy himself, on the 22nd January, 1874, wrote this minute: "This is a horrible revelation, and I feel under an obligation to the Colonial Surgeon for the pains he has taken in bringing this to my notice." And the Major-General wrote this minute: "In the first place I should cancel all licences to keep brothels. I cannot think how these establishments are more necessary here than in any other colony, and I have never known of them except at Hong Kong and Singapore."

Now, I do not mention this to enquire whether Major-General Whitfield is right or wrong, but simply to show that he recommended the abolition of these licensed houses in 1874; and yet a despatch was sent to Lord Carnarvon, telling the Secretary of State that no syphilis was present in either the army or navy and that no complaints had been made. You see the extraordinary difficulty Her Majesty's Government has to get at the truth.

Your address referred to the fact that I was a member of the Select Committee in 1864, appointed by the House of Commons at that time to decide upon the provisions of the Contagious Diseases Prevention Bill. That was the first Bill in this country, and it is true that I endeavoured to mitigate the severe penalties it proposed to inflict on the women, to such an extent that the Chairman requested me to report the Bill at the Bar of the House, which I did, and that Bill became the first of these Acts. Now that you have come to me to-day, and I see before me members of the House of Commons, and leading public men, I must say that having had any hand or part whatever in that original measure is to me a subject of regret. When that measure was before the Select Committee an honourable friend of mine, the Secretary to the Admiralty, told the members of the Committee that it was essential to pass it for the navy and the army; and he pointed to the Colonies of Hong Kong and Malta as the two places where the experiment had been tried with immense success, and had almost eradicated venereal disease. I believed his statement; and he himself believed it, no doubt. He acted on official reports. That was in 1864, and believing those reports I voted for the Bill. Now that I am the Governor of the Colony of Hong Kong, I have had the means of examining in the archives of the Colony the accuracy or otherwise of the reports which so influenced my vote as a member of Parliament, and I now see that those reports, as put before me, were not trustworthy.

In 1864, when I gave that vote, the statement made to me and to other members of the Committee on the first Contagious Diseases Bill in

England, was that the first Ordinance of the kind passed in Hong Kong in 1857, had worked so well that no amendment of the law there was required, and that venereal disease had been stamped out by the working of the Ordinance of 1857. In the Archives of Hong Kong, among many Reports, is the following one, dated 19th April, 1867. It was not intended for publication; it was a Report of the then Colonial Surgeon, Dr. Murray, to the Governor; but it has the following sentence, "that Venereal disease has been on the increase in spite of all that has been done to check it, is no new discovery; that has already been brought before the notice of his Excellency the Governor and is a powerful argument in favour" (you would say in favour of abolishing the existing Act) "of additional legislation."

Now Dr, Murray in 1867, although the Act of 1857 had been ten years in operation makes the confession that disease was increasing, and therefore it was necessary to have, as he says, "additional legislation." The additional legislation was passed, and the Act of 1867 in Hong Kong came into operation. Under that Act and under the previous Act, extraordinary abuses occurred to which I have called the attention of the Secretary of State. I had discovered that the allegations on which I was induced as a Member of Parliament to vote for the English system were inaccurate. I was deluded by incorrect reports, and I saw in the Colony abuses existing, which have effect far beyond the range of Hong Kong. Let me instance one or two only. We get from Great Britain some European police. They are men selected with care for good conduct, and they are sometimes married men; their passages, and their wives' passages, have been paid to Hong Kong, where married-police quarters are provided. But what transpired when that Commission of mine was held? The Registrar-General had recorded in his book, morning after morning, the evidence of informers selected from that police force, whom he had employed to commit adultery with unlicensed Chinese women; and some of these men were married police, whose wives were brought to Hong Kong; so that, in point of fact, he was not only encouraging adultery but paying for it with the money of the State. Well, I stopped that, of course. There was another witness examined by the Registrar-General, and what was his evidence? He said, "I am a sailor on board one of her Majesty's ships, and I was asked by the inspector of brothels to act as informer. I got some marked dollars, and tried to enter a Chinese house, but I was repulsed and driven back. At length I got into a house, and I produced my dollars, and I consorted with a Chinese woman." He said that this occurred some days ago, and he had given her name, and he had heard that she was to be tried by the Registrar-General, and he added, "Unfortunately I have got venereal disease, and I am inclined to think I got it from that girl I was paid to go with." That is recorded, and the girl was sent to prison. And what occurred then? Three days afterwards the very same man was again employed in the same department, on the same duty, and he brought up two other women; and it is recorded that he consorted with these women on the night before. And all this was done with Government money.

At the head of the Registrar-General's Department in Hong Kong, we appoint an officer, as we believe of the highest character. One of the gentlemen so employed (I mention it to you because it was twice referred to in the public prints of Hong Kong, once before my arrival and once not long since), puts on a false beard and moustache, he takes marked money in his waistcoat pocket, and proceeds to the back lanes of the Colony, knocks at various doors, and at length gains admission to a house. He addresses the woman who opens the door, and tells her he wants a Chinese girl. There is an argument as to the price, and he agrees to give four dollars. He is shown up to the bedroom with the girl, and he gives her the money. What I am now telling you is the gentleman's own evidence. He records how he flung up the window and put out his head and whistled. The police whom he had in attendance in the street, broke open the door and arrested a girl. She is brought up next day to be tried for the offence, but before whom? Before the Acting Registrar-General—before the same gentleman who had the beard and moustache the night before. He tries her himself, and on the books of the Registrar-General's office (I have turned to them and read his own evidence recorded in his own handwriting) there is his own conviction of the girl of the offence, and his sentence that she be fined 50 dollars, and some months' imprisonment. I mention this for this reason—that the officer who did that was appointed because he was supposed to be a man of exceptionally high moral tone, and good conduct and demeanour. But what would be the effect on any man of having to administer such an Act?

There is another case mentioned, not in the papers laid before the House of Commons, but in those laid before my Legislative Council. In that evidence there is a case of one of the European Inspectors of Brothels, and I was struck by this fact in his evidence. He says, "I took the marked money from the Registrar-General's office and followed a woman, and consorted with her, and gave her the money; and the moment I had done so, I put my hand in my pocket and pulled out the badge of office, and pointed to the Crown and arrested the woman." THE CROWN! Here is a poor Chinese woman and here is an officer of the Colony, and this is the degradation to which in a British Colony the Crown was exposed!

I am not sure I can tell worse things, for one scarcely knows what is worst; but this has happened:—An Inspector of Police has said he had reason to suspect a certain house of being a brothel. "I saw people going in and out suspiciously. I accordingly broke in and I have arrested this elderly woman, and this young woman, and I charge them with being common prostitutes under the Act." He swears that he had reasonable cause to believe that they are Common Prostitutes. Well the Registrar-General condemns them to what the Chinese women deem to be a terrible thing, namely, to be at once examined by the Colonial Surgeon. They are taken to some place to be examined. Not for the first time there is a physical contest—these poor creatures struggle—they are overpowered and examined. Two days afterwards the case, which meantime was remanded, is brought forward again, and

the Inspector says that the Colonial Surgeon's certificate is to this effect—
 “I examined these two women : the elder woman is evidently a married woman—she is not diseased. The young woman is a virgin and is not diseased.”

It is satisfactory to know that the present Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Kimberley, has not hesitated to stigmatize such things as “revolting abuses.”

To a leading Chinese merchant of Canton, to whom I was talking about the progress of my Colony, I said, “Your people now are making a large fortune here. Why not send down your second son to enter into the house of a Chinese merchant, and learn the business there?” “I could not,” he said, “for this reason:—Hong Kong is a sink of iniquity.” I replied, “this is a Christian Colony; we have been here now for 40 years, we are supposed to be doing the best we can to spread Civilization and Christianity.” “I repeat” he said “it is a sink of iniquity, in my mind. As Chinamen we think of domestic purity and family life—we reverence such things—but how do I see the poor Chinese treated in this Colony:”—and then he told me stories similar to the abuses I have alluded to.

I wrote a despatch in August, 1881, in which I told Lord Kimberley that “The Chinese girls who are registered by the Government for the use of Europeans and Americans detest the life they are compelled to lead.” Let me explain what you may not be aware of: A Government license is issued in these odious words, “Chinese women for the use of Europeans only.” I went on to say in my despatch, “These Chinese women have a dread and abhorrence of foreigners, and especially of the foreign sailors and soldiers. Such Chinese girls are the real slaves in Hong Kong.”

Now to that statement I adhere. I give it to you on the full authority of the Governor of the Colony. I have been five years looking at the operation of this law in Hong Kong, and that is the result to which I have arrived—that under the flag of England there is slavery there, but it is slavery created, and protected by these Ordinances.

I have also stated to Her Majesty's Government my opinion that a State supervision of vice in the sense in which it prevails in Hong Kong is likely to fail and to cause greater evils than those the Government desire to mitigate. May I say one word upon an argument which, as the Governor of British China, has forced itself on my mind. The words of the merchant of Canton who called Hong Kong a “sink of iniquity,” have a wide application, because the British Colony of Hong Kong is geographically a part of a great Empire, an Empire where you have missionaries of various churches. I have been asked to explain the curious and distressing fact that Christianity is declining in China. I think it is declining mainly on account of the treaties we have forced upon the Chinese; but I will frankly tell you it is declining also because they see these girls registered in such houses “for Europeans” and made practically slaves under our flag. And it is not merely as it affects the Chinese mission, but it has a political effect which the members of Parliament present will understand. That Colony was established to

influence China, to make in the far-off part of Asia a great nation friendly to England, apart from the commercial advantages which have followed, it was to be an ally of England. But China is in great uncertainty now. Can China ally herself to England? Statesmen there ask themselves this question. They look to the opium smuggling of Hong Kong, and when they also see a system established which cuts to the root of the domestic life of the Chinese and the purity of the home, they do not like the flag under which such things are done. I will only say to you that it is our duty—the duty of public men, to secure for England a staunch and faithful ally in Asia. That can be done. It can be done if we treat the Chinese Government with ordinary fair play and justice; if the local laws and the departments of the local Government set a good instead of a bad example, and if we place Her Majesty's Chinese subjects in Hong Kong on an equal footing with the other inhabitants of the colony.

MR. W. FOWLER, M.P., thanked his Excellency for the information he had given, and referred briefly to the progress of the movement in Great Britain for the abolition of the Contagious Diseases Acts; after which the deputation withdrew.

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