

THE PAUPER HOSPITAL IN EARLY SINGAPORE (PART V) (1860-1873)—SECTION 2

By Y. K. Lee

On New Year's Day, 1866, the Honorary Secretary of the Hospital, Mr. R. C. Woods, wrote to the Editor of the Singapore Free Press. The sorry plight of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital and its inmates was once again made public and the community prepared for the dire consequences if relief did not come soon.¹

"I need make no apology for soliciting your aid and co-operation on behalf of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital. . . . They are crowded together in a manner much to be regretted, but although thus crowded, many hundreds more infest the streets of the Town and our suburban roads to the great disgust of every passerby. Not only, Mr. Editor, have the Committee received into the hospital many more than it is capable of conveniently accommodating, but the applicants rejected for want of room has far exceeded the number of patients admitted. The time is near at hand when nearly 300 of the miserable creatures now in hospital must be driven from the asylum unless a great and united effort is made on the part of the public to reduce the existing debt and to provide for the future maintenance of the charity. In a word, Mr. Editor, we are deeply in debt and this has been brought about notwithstanding the strictest economy. The expenses have exceeded the receipts simply because the number claiming and receiving help has averaged more than four-fold that of the former years. At the end of 1864, the amount due to the Treasurer was nearly \$1820/-, now it is more than \$3000/- and daily augmenting. It is, Mr. Editor, very unkind and most inequitable to allow so large a sum to be due simply because the amiable and generous Treasurer does not require interest or compel us at once to close the hospital unless the full sum is liquidated, and it is a reflection on our proverbial liberal community that so large a sum continues due for a single day or week longer. Not only, Mr. Editor, must immediate steps be taken to discharge this pressing demand but the future support of the hospital must engage general attention, for I cannot believe for a moment that the public will allow the hospital doors to be closed against patients for want of funds to provide food, clothing, servants and other necessary requirements. The Government furnishes medicine,

and not only gives medical superintendence but also secures for the institution the services of a resident Apothecary and native dressers. . . . The conviction is too strong to be resisted that sooner or later the maintenance of paupers will force itself on the attention of all by necessitating a levy of a tax or rate for the purpose, . . . unless contrary to our experiences, the entire charge is met by voluntary payments in amount equal to every contingency. . . ."

In 1865, there were 1277 male admissions, of whom 1218 were Chinese and 59 of other races. 477 died. Of the 18 females admitted only one was Chinese, and 14 died. The fearful mortality was attributed to the fact that the patients came to hospital only when in the last stage of disease.¹

The Singapore Free Press in its "Annual Retrospect" published on 18th January 1866 wrote: ". . . . All our Charitable institutions deteriorated. Some ceased to exist. . . . The Chinese Poor House is indebted to its Treasurer nearly \$3000/-, and unless the debt is removed it must be given up. . . ." ²

One of the first to respond was the Singapore Amateur Musical Society.³

" SINGAPORE AMATEUR MUSICAL SOCIETY

Under the patronage of his Honour the Governor.

The members of the above society will give their Second Concert of vocal and instrumental music for the benefit of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital in the upper room of the Town Hall on the evening of Tuesday 1st May.

Admission \$2

A plan of the room may be seen, seats secured and tickets, programmes and books of words (25 cents each) obtained (for cash only) at Messers John Little & Co.

Doors open at 7.15; to commence at 8.25 precisely."

The concert netted about \$250/- for the Hospital. The rent of the Hall was \$50/- as the Municipal Commissioners did not waive the fee.⁴ The newspapers were all praise for the Society and once again appealed to the public to come forward to support this charity:

". . . . It was given for the benefit of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital, an institution which is at present in a state of insolvency, and unless strongly supported must be abandoned. The example set by

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our Amateurs will, we trust, not be lost on the Chinese who are perhaps more interested in the matter than we are, as nine-tenths of the inmates of the Poor House in question are of their country. The Chinese are naturally benevolent and will, we feel certain, respond heartily to the charitable exertions of the Europeans. They merely require a lead and are sure to follow suit. The programme offered all lovers of music a splendid treat. . . . We sincerely trust this effort of our Amateurs to revive one of the most important charities in our midst will be warmly responded to and supported. It would not be a bad idea for our Chinese friends to make a collection during the day and add it to the proceeds of the concert."⁵ ". . . Much has been done by Government and by individual charity in support of the hospital, but a debt of some \$3000/- still remains a heavy burden upon its usefulness, and we have good reason for thinking that unless the money is found to liquidate this sum, the whole institution must collapse. As we have before indicated, we deem it to be the duty of the Government itself to provide measures against such an event occurring by imposing some kind of indirect taxation on the Chinese inhabitants themselves, seeing that it is they who are chiefly benefited by the hospital and probably if the long talk of Transfer takes place, something of the kind may be done, but in the meantime, while Government is inactive, the evil keeps ever increasing and demands instant steps to relieve it. . . ."⁵

Letters appeared in the Press demanding immediate action by the Government:⁶

". . . Singapore will soon degenerate into a mere Chinese lazaretto, for no person possessed of nerves to be shocked or a stomach to be turned, will be able to pass through the streets. I allude to the swarms of loathsome beggars which have infested the Town for the last few days. I cannot pause to ask from where they came, besides of what use would it be. They are too numerous. . . . That measures should be adopted to prevent their landing; that after they are on shore, some regulation should exist to keep them from offending the public eye, and that if Tocksing's Hospital is not sufficient, further accommodation should be provided, are duties which fall to the province of the Authorities and they should be undertaken at once. From the north, from the south, from the east and from the west, they come and Singapore is at present the rendezvous of all Chinese afflicted with leprosy, gangrene, cancer and all the festering horrors of the East within a 100 miles. . . ."

And the Press persisted in their attempts to get the Government to be more directly involved in the care of the paupers:⁷

". . . We trust that one of the first Acts passed under the Transfer will relate to the vagrants, lepers and diseased who at present infest the

Town and sicken the hearts of the inhabitants. The other evening we witnessed the departure of a cartload of them for Tan Tock Seng's Hospital. They had been picked up in the streets by the Police and were in every stage of the loathsome disease. Where they came from seems to be nobody's business in this bulwark of freedom, but why Singapore should be allowed to become a sewer for all the impurities from neighbouring states and islands, is a question well deserving the attention of our legislators. We have quite sufficient of our own incurables. There is not hospital room enough for our own sick, and that noble establishment reared by one of our Chinese merchants is already deeply in debt. . . . We again appeal to the Executive to do their duty boldly and honestly, and to make every effort to relieve our island of the mass of loathsome disease which infest our streets and is a disgrace to the settlement."

Another concert for the benefit of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital was held on Wednesday the 19th December 1866:⁸

". . . For the benefit of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital.

Theatre Royal

Under the distinguished patronage of the Honourable the Governor, the members of the German Liederstafel will give a performance in the Town Hall on Wednesday the 19th December, commencing with J. FREUDENTHAL'S OPERA in the act entitled "Die Barden" (a parody) and concluding with a roaring farce to be performed by the members of the Corps Dramatique.

Tickets for reserved seats (\$2/-) can be secured at Messers John Little & Co. (for cash only) on and after Saturday the 15th December.

Doors open at a quarter to eight, to commence at a quarter past eight precisely."

This concert also had very favourable write-ups by the Press. ". . . To those to whom Providence has given extraordinary talents, the conviction of being thereby able to alleviate the misery of their fellow beings must cause great inward satisfaction. To us, the knowledge of possessing friends who are not only so richly endowed but who have also the heart and the disposition to apply those talents to charitable purposes must ever also remain a source of gratification and pride. May their friendly co-operation in this spirit of benevolence long continue to exist amongst us."⁹

The Transfer referred to above was the transfer of the administration of the Straits Settlements by the India Office to the Colonial Office. This took place on 1st April 1867, after years of agitation by the mercantile community. The Straits Settlements became a Crown Colony. This was a change that had utmost important consequences. One of which was

the establishment of a Legislative Council through whose Unofficial Members, the inhabitants had a voice (howbeit small) in the administration of the Colony. We will here confine ourselves to the effect on the paupers and Tan Tock Seng's Hospital.

A new Governor was appointed, on whose executive powers there was no restraint other than the directions of the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The designations of the Medical Officers were changed. The Senior Surgeon became the Colonial Surgeon and the Assistant Surgeon, the Assistant Colonial Surgeon.

In June 1867, the Daily Times urged the Government (now independent of control from India) to do something positive for the paupers and Tan Tock Seng's Hospital immediately as the problem would become more acute as the population increased:¹⁰

“... The disposition of the present Government appears to be in a particular degree to push on improvement in anticipation of resources, and it is quite true that we are not without necessities that would justify such a policy. One of these we may place before notice in nearly the same words as we did two years ago. The Pauper Hospital, though its maintenance may for a short time longer devolve upon voluntary subscriptions, must ultimately become a charge upon the State. The demand upon it cannot be expected to abate nor is the fearful disease to which it gives shelter likely to assume among the poorer classes a less malignant form. As the Settlement increases in population, the greater will be the number of sick poor thrown upon our hands. . . . With these facts before it, and with the knowledge that there must come to an end of voluntary subscription towards this municipal necessity, the Government cannot, without incurring the most serious charge, hesitate to act. We do not believe as far as our local government is concerned, there is any desire to evade responsibility in this matter.

One great reason which has not yet been urged why this institution should pass into the keeping of Government is, we think, that as at present it is altogether unfit for the purposes it is forced to serve. Doubtless, this fact has been kept in the background lest it might discourage support and rob the poor of the meagre help they get, but it is not the less true. In the first instance, there is the glaring wrong that within the same walls though it may be in separate divisions, are crowded together the sufferers from temporary disorders and the incurable victims of leprosy. No wonder many of the poor whom we seek to help look upon our kindness as tyranny and our asylum as a jail, and that they seek all stratagems to escape from it, dragging their weakened bodies for miles through jungle and brushwood to be beyond reach of re-capture. We have no right to take our fellow creatures whose only crime is poverty and whose disease but a passing ailment and expose them to the spectacle, much less to the contagion

of leprosy. Better, less sinful, we believe, to leave them to starve in our streets. We have no right to relieve ourselves of the importunities of beggars in this way. . . . But we trust that this disgrace will soon be removed from us, as we have said the time has come for Government to intervene, and it is hoped that the broad distinctions between the functions of a leper and a pauper hospital will be carefully borne in mind. . . .”

On 5th August 1867, Mr. Seah Eu Chin who had served as Treasurer and Member of the Committee without interruption since the founding of the Hospital, received a letter from the Honorary Secretary in acknowledgement of the valuable aid he had contributed to the institution. This letter was published in the newspapers:¹¹

“My Dear Sir,

I have been desired by the Committee of Management of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital at Singapore to convey to you their sincere thanks for the active aid you have always afforded in procuring large additions to the funds of the Charity, and thereby enabling the Committee to afford assistance to the numerous paupers in the Hospital.

I remain,
R. C. WOODS
Hon. Secretary”

On 18th December 1867, the Secretary of State for the Colonies ordered the Governor to report on the Hospitals and Lunatic Asylums in the Straits Settlements.¹² “The Settlements having now become a Crown Colony, I have to instruct you to furnish me with answers to the questions enclosed in the circular . . . and at the same time to submit any remarks which may occur to you and which would be likely to make me fully acquainted with the important subjects to which they relate.” In his reply to the Secretary of State on 5th June 1868 the Governor said that he considered the “General and Convict prison hospitals and Lunatic Asylums to be properly managed and well regulated establishments. I cannot say the same for the Pauper Hospitals, but I am engaged in perfecting arrangements which will give a similar control over the various Pauper establishments in the Settlements, and will enable the Governor to place them on a proper footing.”¹³

The Governor had in fact begun to tackle this problem not long after taking up his appointment. At the Legislative Council Meeting on 18th May 1868 he posed the problem to the Members and informed them of the steps he had taken.¹⁴

He told the Council that very soon after his arrival in the Colony, his attention had been drawn to the insufficiency of the arrangements which existed for the care and management of paupers who were aged, infirm, lunatic or leprous. The main difficulty which he found in dealing with the subject arose from its not having hitherto been considered that Government ought to be responsible for their

care. And that in consequence, this duty had been undertaken by private individuals who had provided various establishments supported by endowments and by the contributions of the charitable, to which Government gave some assistance chiefly by providing gratuitous medical aid. He mentioned the establishments at Penang and Malacca, and said that Tan Tock Seng's Hospital at Singapore as the Members all knew, had latterly proved altogether unable to meet the demands made upon it, and that great suffering to the poor had consequently ensued. Under those circumstances, he had proposed to the Trustees and Managers of the establishments that they should hand them over *in fee* to the Government with all their funds and endowments, on condition that the Government should henceforth assume the duty of providing for the poor of the Settlements, the gentlemen in question giving an undertaking that their personal aid in the management of the affairs of the establishments should continue to be afforded as may be required, and that they should continue to raise funds from private sources to assist the Government. The Trustees of the Pauper Hospitals at Penang and Malacca were reluctant to participate in this scheme, but those of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital wholeheartedly agreed.

However, when the Governor asked the Council if they were prepared to adopt the arrangements as regards Singapore, he met with opposition from the Unofficial Members. They were of the opinion that subscriptions would fall off and the heavy costs would entail levying of special taxes. Moreover, they were certain that if the poor found comfortable quarters provided for them in sickness, they would flock to the hospital in such numbers that the burden to the Colony would be intolerable. They felt that the Government need not do more than what it was already doing.

The Governor then decided not to press the issue. Later, when the Trustees at Penang and Malacca changed their minds and were very anxious to accept the Governor's offer, the Governor did not bring the matter again before the Legislative Council as he knew that the Unofficials still did not favour the scheme. He instead wrote a long report to the Secretary of State and stated that he would only take action if ordered to do so.¹⁵

“. . . I have admitted that the condition of the Pauper Hospitals throughout the Settlements is not good. I might have gone further and said it was very bad. I was however in hopes of being able to put them on a sound and efficient footing, but I am sorry to say that my efforts have not been attended with success. . . . The Governor has no power to regulate or give orders concerning them, though in anything of importance, the Colonial Medical Officer usually takes upon himself to do what he thinks is necessary and it is not resisted, it being clear that if Government were to withdraw its aid, the establishments would collapse. . . . The Trustees of the Singa-

pore Institution, chiefly Europeans and wealthy Chinese, accepted this proposal and went so far as to nominate their Board to draw up regulations for the management of the establishment of which I approved. . . . I then brought the matter before the Council to know if they were prepared to adopt the arrangement as regards Singapore, but found no disposition among the Unofficial Members to do so. . . .

Since then I have heard that the Trustees of the Penang and Malacca Establishments are very anxious to be allowed to accept my offer as regards their establishments, but as I do not think the Legislative Council is likely to receive it with more favour than it did before, I do not contemplate bringing it before them unless your Lordship should be of opinion that the state of these Establishments is such as to make it a duty of the Government to take them in hand.

Nothing is to be hoped for so long as they remain under their present management. . . . All real power is vested in the hands of the Unofficials or private persons who form the majority of the Board. The management is, as might be expected, wasteful and inefficient. If any credit is to be taken, these gentlemen at once assume it, and if any difficulty arises, the Government is appealed to directly to extricate them from it and is expected to take the blame for every mistake that may be made. . . .

This would doubtless cost the Colony more than it now pays, but if it be a duty of the Government to maintain its sick and helpless poor, I am satisfied no more efficient nor economical arrangement for so doing can be desired.

I shall be glad to be favoured with your Lordship's views. . . .”

In the meantime, the Colonial Surgeon, who found Tan Tock Seng's Hospital to be so overcrowded as to be dangerous, obtained the Governor's sanction to restrict the number of admissions. The consequence of this was a series of violent attacks on the Government for interfering with an arrangement of which there had hitherto been no complaints, and which was quite good enough for the people affected by it. Questions were asked in the Legislative Council and an inquiry demanded by the Unofficial Members:¹⁶

“. . . That His Excellency the Governor be requested to cause an inquiry into the present state and condition of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital, and as to the propriety of the restrictions imposed on the admission of inmates.”

The Governor replied that he would be happy to make inquiries if the Council wished it, and hoped that the Council would go even deeper into the question of the sick poor of the Settlement.¹⁷ There was very great difficulty in obtaining subscriptions from the Chinese on account of the lack of accommodation for paupers in Tan Tock Seng's Hospital and a

very great number of them were consequently found wandering in the Town. The Chinese had subscribed on the understanding that the paupers would be taken off the streets. This was a vicious circle.

The Secretary of State's instructions regarding paupers were contained in his despatch of 4th September 1869. He ordered the Governor to appoint a Select Committee to study the problem in depth, and to ensure firm control over pauper hospitals which were to be established and maintained by Government: ¹⁸

“ . . . It seems to me quite impossible that the state of these establishments bad as it is acknowledged to be, can be allowed to continue, and I have to request you to bring the whole question before a Committee of your Council which should comprise one or more Unofficial Members for investigation and report. I have to impress upon you the necessity for the adoption of some plan by which the control of the Government should, as a condition of further grants from the Colonial Treasury, be really felt in the organisation and future regulation of the Pauper Hospitals, and in the event of the collapse of the present hospitals, it will be the imperative duty of the local government to establish and maintain an adequate number of similar establishments for the relief of the poor. . . . There can be no doubt that in all cases in which it is possible for the Government to exercise its authority for the improvement of such institutions and especially those ascertained to be in a bad state, a serious responsibility is incurred by not doing so.”

The Secretary of State's despatch was laid before the Legislative Council at its meeting of 15th November 1869. A Select Committee on Pauperism was appointed at the 24th November meeting, comprising:—¹⁹

- the Lt-Governor of Penang
- the Lt-Governor of Malacca
- the Auditor-General
- Mr. F. S. Brown
- Mr. T. Scott
- Mr. W. Adamson

In the meanwhile, more scandals regarding Tan Tock Seng's Hospital came before the public eye, resulting in severe censure of the whole medical service. A Malay girl had burnt herself when her clothes caught fire after a lamp had overturned. She was brought by the police to the General Hospital at 1.45 a.m. but was refused admission as there was no accommodation for females. The police corporal then took the girl to Tan Tock Seng's Hospital, a distance of more than a mile away. Here she was less unfortunate. The Chinese Apprentice received her into the hospital but declined to call the Apothecary in charge as he had strict orders not to disturb his superior at night. The girl died. The Straits Times said, “. . . Our hospitals are left too much to the

control of Apothecaries. In scarcely any part of the civilised world will hospitals be found without resident physicians or surgeons or both. Here, on the contrary, the Government Surgeon and Assistant Surgeon are underpaid and in compensation are allowed private practice—a most pernicious system. They visit the hospitals at stated hours, issue orders and the Apothecaries and their apprentices do the rest—after which we may reasonably suppose they hasten to their private patients. . . .” ²⁰ On 20th November 1869, Mr. Scott gave notice that at the next meeting of the Legislative Council he would call the attention of Government to this deplorable incident. ²¹ At the meeting, the Governor stated that as there was no accommodation for females in the General Hospital orders had been given for all such cases in future to be taken direct to Tan Tock Seng's Hospital. He had also called upon the Colonial Surgeon for a report on the subject of hospital accommodation for females. He denied that there was negligence and said that the woman had received all the attention that was possible. ²²

The Governor's reply did not satisfy the Press. There were more criticisms about the “crime against humanity” and the “defects of our system of hospital management”. ²² “. . . There is grave reason to doubt the advisability of sending all such cases in future to the Pauper Hospital, and it may be questioned whether His Excellency has made himself acquainted by personal inspection with the sort of place to which unfortunate women who may meet with serious accidents or female invalids are to be sent for treatment. . . . the distance at which the Pauper Hospital is located. . . . The journey of an additional mile or so over a macadamised road usually in a hack gharry is an infliction most invalids would prefer to be spared, and it may be doubted if the Colonial or Assistant Surgeons would deliberately issue such a prescription, at least to their private patients.” ²²

Criticism of the hospital system in the Press continued throughout 1870. No resident doctors at the hospitals, irresponsible apothecaries with too much authority and the evils of private practice by government doctors were topics dilated upon again and again. ²³

After one and a half years, the Report of the Select Committee on Pauperism was laid before the Legislative Council on 5th June 1871, ²⁴ and the debate on it took place at the meeting of 4th September, 1871.

The Committee had studied the problem of three categories of paupers—lunatic paupers, leprous paupers and those who were neither lunatic nor leprous. The problem was studied as it affected the Colony as a whole, i.e. Singapore, Penang and Malacca. We will confine ourselves to portions of the report which concerned non-lunatic and non-leprous paupers in Singapore.

The following were the terms of reference of the Committee:

- “1st. What number of persons will it be necessary to provide accommodation for, supposing strict vagrancy regulations were to be put in force?
- 2nd. What is the existing extent of hospital accommodation; and how may this be most economically made use of?
- 3rd. What additional accommodation should be provided; and where will the additional buildings be most conveniently placed?
- 4th. How far is it advisable to disturb the existing arrangements under which the expenses of the Pauper Hospitals are divided between the Government and certain charitable bodies?
- 5th. What checks should be devised with the view of:
 - (a) checking the importation of diseased Paupers from the neighbouring States?
 - (b) recovering expenses from the importers of coolie labourers, or from the relatives of the Paupers?”

They came to the conclusion that in Singapore it was necessary to provide for 600 paupers while the existing accommodation was adequate only for 180. Additional accommodation for 420 patients was thus required.

The Committee recommended four proposals for consideration:

- “1st. Extension of the present Pauper Hospital at the Serangoon Road.
- 2nd. Erection of New Buildings on Balestier Plain.
- 3rd. Re-acquisition of the premises formerly used as the Pauper Hospital on Pearl’s Hill.
- 4th. Erection of New Buildings on the site adjoining the General Hospital at the Bukit Timah Road.”

They themselves were in favour of the fourth recommendation.

Regarding their fourth term of reference, “the Committee have to report that they have not found that any inconvenience whatever has risen from the present system and they see no reason to recommend any alteration in it. . . . There is some reason to believe that if the Hospitals were entirely taken over by the Government, there would be a tendency, at any rate on the part of certain sections of the community, to withdraw their subscriptions which would in that case assume the aspect of a sort of voluntary self-taxation. Whereas if matters are left as they are now, there seems reason to hope that so far from the subscriptions declining, they will consi-

derably increase, especially those from the Chinese community who have been represented to the Committee as in many cases objecting to subscribe at present only on the grounds that the vagrancy regulations are not strictly enforced, and that their object in subscribing, viz. the procuring the removal from the streets of the diseased paupers who now infest them, is not fulfilled. It is to be doubted, however, whether the increased subscriptions would prove sufficient to meet the requirements of the largely-increased number of patients which is anticipated, and Government grants-in-aid would therefore be necessary. . . .”

Regarding the fifth term of reference, the Committee pointed out that if strict supervision were not exercised, Singapore would become an asylum for all the neighbouring states as it was to some extent already. They also drew attention to a second danger:

“ . . . that if great facilities are given for the admission of patients, while at the same time, the condition of the patients is made what it should be, there may grow up in the minds of the poorer classes an impression that they are absolved from the duty of providing for the infirm members of their families and may leave it to be performed by the Government. . . .”

They, however, did not make any firm recommendation. “But while recognising these dangers, the Committee do not think it necessary to make any specific recommendations in regard to them. They think it sufficient to direct the attention of the Government to the matter so that proper watchfulness may be exercised, and any symptoms of the anticipated evils may be promptly reported, and the proper remedies considered and adopted.”

After considering the Report the following motion was made in the Legislative Council and carried unanimously:²⁵

“ . . . That it is not desirable to disturb the existing organisation of private charity for dealing with Paupers, but that it is the duty of the Government to take steps to develop the present system to an extent adequate to meet the present acknowledged wants.”

The Daily Times found fault with the Select Committee for hesitating to acknowledge the responsibility of the Government for the maintenance of the Pauper Hospital. It was hardly creditable to the Government that large public institutions should depend wholly on private charity, but thought that the compromise proposed by the Committee of a Government grant-in-aid was on the whole an equitable one.²⁴

The Report of the Select Committee on Pauperism and the minutes of the Legislative Council meeting of 4th September 1871 were sent to the Secretary of State on 24th October 1871.²⁶ In this despatch, the Governor reported to the Secretary of State that since the resolution regarding paupers was

passed by the Legislative Council, a deputation of gentlemen who formed the Committee of Management of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital had been to see him. They had informed him that one Mr. Young "a gentleman of great influence in this Settlement and the representative of one of the principal Merchant Houses (Messers Boustead & Co.)" was prepared to guarantee the raising of sufficient funds to cover the cost of the keep for one year of the 600 paupers for whom, it was stated in the Report, additional accommodation was required, provided Government would supply the needful accommodation, and also take entire charge of the pauper lepers, and prevent them from being a great annoyance to the public of all classes.

An estimate was also submitted of the cost of what was considered immediately necessary for carrying out the views of the Council in regard to providing for the pressing wants of the poor:

"Works and Buildings

Additional accommodation at Pauper Hospital, Singapore, for say, 120 patients \$1,500

Salaries

Apothecary, Pauper Hospital, increase, from \$420 to \$600	180
Extra Dresser	240
Female Nurse	60
Extra Toty	60
Contingent Expenses, Pauper Hospital	800

The Secretary of State was also informed that the King of Siam had placed at the disposal of the Governor for the Educational and Pauper Institutions the sum of \$5,000. Of this sum, the Governor had given \$2,000 to the Committee of Management of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital.

The Governor ended his despatch with these words.—"I trust these arrangements, which must be considered as but the commencement of a better and more extended provision for the poor, may meet with Your Lordship's approval."

The Secretary of State's reply was sent on 24th January 1872. He reiterated his instructions conveyed in the despatch of 4th September 1869, (vide supra), and made the following observations:²⁷

" . . . The measures which you yourself propose appear in some degree calculated to meet one defect of the Pauper Hospital system, which is indicated by the complaint of the Chinese Community, that 'however much they subscribe, there is still the sight of these wretched creatures crawling about the streets and begging'; but the resolution of Council leaves untouched the evils of waste and inefficiency which have hitherto prevailed. . . . I must seriously impress upon you that it is necessary for the credit of your Government that prompt and efficient attention should be paid to those instructions (of 4th September 1869), and that, as the present system has been

proved to be insufficient, the Government should take upon itself effectively the discharge of this duty, which cannot be neglected without inhumanity.

Although I should much regret the diminution of private charitable contributions, I cannot admit that the possibility of such a diminution is a valid objection to the interposition of Government in a matter so vital to the welfare of the community.

What is urgently required is an efficient system of medical aid to the poor, and such aid is comparatively free from the evils which have been found to be inseparable from every general system of relief of the poor, however, carefully guarded. But I understand that the Pauper Hospital organisation professed to afford relief to mere destitution apart from disease, and within proper limits measures should be devised to render this relief effective. Such relief should, however, be confined to cases of absolute destitution, and utmost care should be taken not to allow it to degenerate into a wholesale practice of almsgiving by the State, or into a system of out-door relief.

With regard to the provision of public medical and hospital relief it will be a question for your consideration whether the Government should keep up the organisation of the present Pauper Hospitals as places of medical relief, or confine them to the relief of cases not exclusively medical, and have recourse to an extension of the organisation of the present Government Hospitals for the accomplishment of the object in view. . . .

Her Majesty's Government must hold you responsible for giving effect, as well in the Pauper Hospitals, as the Government Hospitals, to the rules and principles laid down as to space per head, ventilation, water supply, drainage, light, proportion of attendants to patients, character of attendants, resident Medical Officers, frequent periodical reports and other particulars. Where full effect cannot be given to those rules and principles, or local circumstances render it unadvisable to give effect to them, you will report to me exactly the omissions and deviations called for by circumstances, stating the grounds on which they have been made. (The rules were laid down in the Digest on Colonial Hospitals.) . . ."

This despatch and all previous relevant papers and correspondence regarding paupers were laid before the Legislative Council on 15th August 1872. Opinions were expressed on how best to comply with the instructions of Her Majesty's Government at the next two meetings held on 20th²⁸ and 22nd August 1872.²⁹

The Governor mentioned that the Government had done its best to carry out the intentions of the

Select Committee with respect to improving the accommodation for the paupers as far as the means voted allowed. Of the \$1500. \$1442 had been expended in the erection of two additional sheds at Tan Tock Seng's Hospital providing accommodation for an additional 120 patients. The principal point for discussion was how to fully implement the proposals to adopt completely the care of the paupers. "I say that the main point you will have to consider will be in what manner this should be done, whether exclusively out of the funds of the Colony without contributions from without, or whether it would be desirable to avail ourselves of such assistance, and if so, the machinery to be used for the purpose of obtaining this aid."

Mr. Greenshields was of the opinion that it would be a pity to put Tan Tock Seng's Hospital wholly under Government charge and do away with voluntary subscriptions. His proposal was

"that in order to keep up public interest in a matter of this kind, existing subscriptions should if possible be continued, and the whole thing put under Government inspection, and the Committee of Management being kept on. Of course, their functions will be well known, some of them will only be honorary, but still if the Chinese would continue their subscriptions it would be a great gain. I am quite sure all the European firms will do all they could and endeavour so far as their influence went to make it obligatory on the Chinese to subscribe and keep up the character of the Institution. . . . I am quite sure that to do it by a voluntary system is impossible, but with Government help, I think, it could be very well carried out."

Dr. Little, who had been the Honorary Secretary of the Hospital in the early years did not think that this compromise solution would work. "Whenever the Government takes over anything, it is useless, I think, to expect any subscriptions. . . . For a small trifle you could get by voluntary subscriptions I would have nothing to do with it. The person who pays the fiddler is entitled to the choice of the tune. Let the Government take the responsibility and whatever is done, right or wrong, let them have the benefit of it. Of course, they would take over the large funds belonging to Tan Tock Seng's Hospital."

The Governor then made known his views:

". . . It appears to me that the time has arrived when this Council should take over entirely the care of the paupers and lepers. I propose therefore, if such be your views that the Government shall be so empowered, that the machinery by which it should be managed shall be a Government official aided by a voluntary committee of subscribers to the Institution. I say subscribers, because I assume that the persons who would give their time to the management of the institution would be such as would also subscribe to it. I have reason to hope that there will be no diffi-

culty in either of the settlements in obtaining the aid of European and Chinese gentlemen who would be willing to aid as they have hitherto done, and perhaps to a greater extent than they have hitherto done, when the institutions are placed under Government control and the Government is made responsible for their proper order, and I have reason to think that the Government may hope to receive considerable aid to the Public Treasury towards the large expense which will be incurred. This is the idea which I present for your deliberation. As I said before it is hardly necessary to support it by reasons because the whole matter has already been exhausted by us."

The long debate before the decision was made as to the future arrangements for the management of the paupers took place on 1st October 1872.³⁰

There was a long and heated argument between the Colonial Secretary who was also the President of the Committee of Management and Dr. Little. After stating the reasons why the Government should be responsible for the relief of the paupers ("it is the duty of every Government to provide for the aid of the sick and infirm in the absence of adequate effort for this purpose on the part of private individuals"; "if we had no poor, we should have no cheap labour. . . . Our labour is so cheap that they have only enough to feed and clothe themselves, and in the case of sickness or misfortune they must become poor"; ". . . the Government have done all that we possibly can to make our poor a diseased poor. . . . the awful vice of opium-smoking. . . ."), and tracing briefly the history of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital (emphasising the loss of interest of the public and the reduction of subscriptions as a result of previous Government interference), Dr. Little castigated the present Committee of Management and the Medical Officer for negligence in the performance of their duties. "With all this, you can easily fancy, Your Excellency, that the time has come when it is necessary indeed that the Government should take over the entire management of the hospital in a strict and proper manner. You will be supported by public opinion in doing so. . . ."

The Colonial Secretary retorted that Dr. Little had been guilty of a very great breach of courtesy, and as a medical man, of professional etiquette. He went on to rebut Dr. Little's allegations.

After further discussion in which Members of the Council indicated their views, the Governor began his speech with a reprimand:

". . . There has been a good deal of discussion upon it, and a good deal of it has taken the turn of finding fault with the past. I confess myself that I think we might more profitably have devoted our time to considering what we should do in future. . . . I hold that the Government has no responsibility at all for the maintenance or management of any of the Pauper Establishments in the Settlements. It has at present no such res-

possibility, none was assumed by the former Government, and none has been accepted by this Government. . . . After hearing what I have heard today, I think I am in a position to make proposals which will probably meet your concurrence. These proposals vary little or nothing from those contained in the Despatch of 1869. . . . The proposal which I shall then make to you, gentlemen, is that these establishments shall be taken over by the Government, with the understanding that the Government is thenceforth responsible for them; that all expenses attending their maintenance shall be defrayed by the Government as those of every other institution and establishment are (that, of course, gives this Council a control over the funds), but that unlike other public establishments, the Government shall be entitled to claim the aid of independent gentlemen, for the purpose of assisting in the management of these institutions, and also of relieving the Colony of expense by endeavouring to induce those classes of the community who have hitherto contributed, and very liberally, to the support of these institutions to continue their support and aid. . . . The Government shall take over these establishments and that it shall claim the assistance of the public in their management, and in raising funds for their upkeep."

The Colonial Secretary then proposed two resolutions which were carried:

"Resolved, that in the opinion of this Council the entire charge of the Pauper Establishments at Singapore, Penang and Malacca, should be assumed by the Government.

That the Government should call to its aid at each Settlement a Committee of leading and influential gentlemen whose co-operation should be afforded to the Government Officials in the supervision of the establishment, and who should, in addition, use their endeavours to induce the inhabitants to contribute, as they have hitherto done, funds in aid of their support."

"Resolved, that a sum of one thousand four hundred and eighty two dollars be voted for the improvement of Tan Tock Seng's Hospital. . . ."

All the steps taken regarding the whole question of the care and treatment of paupers were reported to the Secretary of State by the Governor on 4th December 1872 together with the proceedings of the various Legislative Council meetings culminating with the one of 1st October 1872:³¹

" . . . I have called on the several Committees of Management to furnish me with the names of three gentlemen, whether on their Boards or not, who are willing to give their assistance to Government in the manner proposed and have requested them to submit for my consideration, the rules and regulations they think desirable for the management of the hospitals and the staff they consider they will require. I propose that the Offi-

cial Members of the Committee shall be few in number, the Colonial Secretary and the Lt-Governors being always the Presidents, and I have every hope that the arrangements which have been determined on will be found to work successfully, giving the Government a direct authority which it does not now possess, supplementing the work of its officers with the aid of gentlemen taking an interest in it, and yet relieving the Colony of a considerable portion of the charge which the maintenance of these establishments on a proper footing will entail. I intend to bring the new arrangements into force on 1st January, 1873. . . ."

In 1872, three new sheds each containing 60 beds were erected at Tan Tock Seng's Hospital in consequence of the rapid increase of paupers requiring admission.³² Two sheds were commenced early in the year and were essentially of a temporary nature, the foundations were of mud and sand and covered with a thin layer of broken brick and river sand. The Principal Civil Medical Officer was not happy with this but had agreed to use them as there were considerable numbers of paupers prowling about the streets. These sheds soon became filled and the third one erected. This third shed was built on piles raising the floor about four feet from the ground, and covered with attap. With this additional shed, there was accommodation for 356 paupers at Tan Tock Seng's Hospital.

This new shed was however soon fully occupied:³³ " . . . On the recent completion of the new ward to the Singapore Pauper Hospital, the Police were very careful to search out every case qualified for admission, and the Town had been almost entirely swept of these people, when one morning, the Police suddenly found about thirty of the worst cases imaginable about the streets of the Town, and on inquiry, it was ascertained that they had been landed during the night from a native coasting vessel. Several of these cases were in such a condition that they could hardly have existed for another 24 hours."

It was the knowledge of facts such as these and the fear of saddling the Colony with a very heavy charge for the care of paupers who had no claim on the Government that had been the reasons for the persistent opposition made by the Unofficial Members of the Legislative Council and others to the Governor's proposal that Government should take over the management and responsibility of the Pauper Hospitals.³³

The Secretary of State had no objections to the Governor's proposals. "With regard to the Pauper Hospitals, the course adopted has my entire approval, and it only remains for me to instruct you to report for time to time, the progress made in carrying into the effect the resolutions of the Council."³⁴

Unforeseen circumstances however prevented the Government taking over Tan Tock Seng's Hospital on 1st January 1873. "There has been some delay owing to the necessity of making additions and

alterations to the existing buildings. The work at Singapore has been retarded by the riots which have lately occurred. . . .”³³ The Governor informed the Secretary of State that when this was done, he would appoint a Commission of three medical men, two of whom would be independent of the Government, to examine carefully into the condition and management of the Pauper Hospitals, and to ascertain, if any, and what improvements could be introduced into them.³³

Another attempt was made to prevent by law the immigration of sick paupers at the end of 1873. After the second reading of the Chinese Immigration Bill, the Governor consulted a prominent Chinese gentleman, who in his suggestions of some alterations, recommended that provisions should be included to prevent the introduction into the Colony of infirm and sick persons, as the law in force (Act XLI of 1850, vide Part IV) had never been enforced or was unenforceable. It was proposed that if the Captain of a ship brought sick persons who were either temporarily or permanently unable to work, he should have the option of taking them back, or should pay such a sum of money as would be sufficient for their keep and treatment in hospital.³⁵

The Chinese Immigration Ordinance (Ordinance No. X of 1873) was passed on 17th October 1873. It was “an ordinance to provide for the better protection of Chinese Immigrants”, and section 10 reads as follows:

“If any such Immigrant on arriving in the Colony shall prove to be sick or infirm and unable to work, or to fulfil his engagement to work, the Registering Officer may require the Master of the Ship in which such Immigrant arrived, to provide for his removal from the Colony, or to deposit such sum of money, or to find good and sufficient security in the Colony for the payment of such sum of money, not exceeding in either case, fifty dollars for each such Immigrant, as the Registering Officer may deem to be sufficient for the maintenance of such Immigrant during sickness or infirmity. Such sum of money shall be applied to the maintenance of such Immigrant during his sickness or infirmity.”

Tan Tock Seng's Hospital came under the new arrangement for its management in September 1873 when the Governor appointed the Committee of Management, the members of which had previously always been elected by the subscribers to the Institution. The following were appointed on 24th September 1873:³⁶

The Hon. the Colonial Secretary
The Hon. the Auditor-General
The Hon. the Colonial Engineer
The Hon. T. Scott
The Hon. H. A. K. Whampoa
The Hon. W. R. Scott
The Inspector-General of Police
The Principal Civil Medical Officer
The Colonial Surgeon

R. C. Woods, Esq.
Dr. Robertson
Tan Seng Poh, Esq.
Cheang Hong Lim, Esq.
Seah Chio Seah, Esq.

A new era for the Hospital had begun.

REFERENCES

ABBREVIATIONS USED:

D.T. = Daily Times. Microfilm. National Library Holdings, Singapore.

LEGCO. = Proceedings of the Legislative Council. Microfilm. National Library Holdings, Singapore.

S.F.P. = Singapore Free Press. Microfilm. National Library Holdings, Singapore.

S.S.R. = Straits Settlements Records. Microfilm. National Library Holdings, Singapore.

S.T. = Straits Times. Microfilm. National Library Holdings, Singapore.

From SS = Despatches from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor of the Straits Settlements. Microfilm. National Library Holdings, Singapore.

To SS = Despatches from the Governor of the Straits Settlements to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Microfilm. National Library Holdings, Singapore.

1. S.F.P. (4.1.1866).
2. S.F.P. (18.1.1866).
3. D.T. (18.4.1866) (26.4.1866).
4. D.T. (3.5.1866).
5. S.F.P. (3.5.1866).
6. D.T. (27.7.1866).
7. D.T. (10.12.1866).
8. D.T. (13.12.1866).
9. S.F.P. (20.12.1866).
10. D.T. (4.6.1867).
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12. From SS. (18.12.1867). Despatch No. 119.
13. To SS. (5.6.1868). Despatch No. 109.
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20. S.T. (20.11.1869).
21. S.T. (27.11.1869).
22. D.T. (2.12.1869).
23. D.T. (4.5.1870). S.T. (17.9.1870) (1.10.1870).
D.T. (1.10.1870) (5.10.1870) (6.10.1870).
24. D.T. (5.6.1871).
25. D.T. (6.9.1871).
26. To SS. (24.10.1871). Despatch No. 250.
27. From SS. (24.1.1872). Despatch No. 24.
28. LEGCO. (20.8.1872).
29. LEGCO. (22.8.1872).
30. LEGCO. (1.10.1872).
31. To SS. (4.12.1872). Despatch No. 203.
32. LEGCO. (31.3.1874). Appendix 8—Annual Report of the Medical Department, 1872.
33. To SS. (10.2.1873). Despatch No. 33.
34. From SS. (28.1.1873). Despatch No. 15.
35. LEGCO. (16.9.1873).
36. Government Gazette. (26.9.1873). Microfilm. National Library Holdings, Singapore.