

# PROSTITUTION AND VENEREAL DISEASE IN EARLY SINGAPORE (1819 — 1889) PART I

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An introduction to the study of the medical history of early Singapore has already been outlined.<sup>1</sup>

As in other parts of the world, prostitution and venereal diseases have always been in existence in Singapore, and will be in the future.

During the first few decades of modern Singapore's history (and also that of the old Straits Settlements, of which Singapore was a component part), there was very little documentary evidence of this age-old problem. Whatever there was, confirmed that the problem existed and that attempts were made to alleviate its far-reaching effects.

In the inventories of medicines in the possession of the Medical Department in 1821<sup>2</sup> and 1827,<sup>3</sup> there were drugs which were used for the treatment of venereal diseases, e.g. mercury and its compounds.

In August 1828, a hospital for the treatment of venereal diseases in camp-followers was established in Malacca (also part of the Straits Settlements), but was abolished a few months later as the Authorities did not consider it worthwhile financially:

*"... A Lock Hospital established for preventing the dissemination of venereal diseases which were extending rapidly amongst the Madras Troops."*

*"The benefits derived from the Lock Hospital Establishment not being in the opinion of our President commensurate to the monthly fixed expenses, we directed the abolition of this Establishment from 1st instant (1st April 1829)."*<sup>5</sup>

The Officer Commanding the 25th Native Infantry Regiment, which was part of the garrison in Singapore in 1830, was very concerned about the health and efficiency of his men. He wrote on 23rd July 1830 to his Commander-in-Chief regarding steps to prevent venereal diseases crippling his regiment:<sup>6</sup>

*"I have the honour to request you will submit for the consideration of the proper authority, the unprecedented circumstances of the great increase of venereal cases in the Hospital of the Regiment under my command, in the hope that some remedy may be supplied through your influence to avert so great an evil, feeling assured that the liberality of Government in erecting a temporary shed for the reception of such abandoned prostitutes as may be so affected, would not be unnecessarily disposed of, the want of which renders the men at this moment unable to perform their military duties and every probability of an increase to that number, unless some immediate steps are taken to check the progress."*

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Singapore in its early years was a garrison town and a trading station, where there were military hospitals, a hospital for seamen and Europeans, a pauper hospital for the native destitutes, a lunatic asylum and a convict hospital for the convicts from India. Very few of the European and native civilians made use of the hospitals. They preferred to be treated at home. Hospital reports and returns provide some more proof, but obviously cannot indicate the true incidence of venereal disease.

"To the Resident Councillor, Singapore.<sup>7</sup>  
*Special Report of the case of Thomas Webber, aet 27,*

*Ship 'Marmion'.*

Was admitted on the 29th December 1849 with all the symptoms of Secondary Syphilis. He has received a variety of medical treatment such as his case requires, but the case has been most protracted and tedious owing to frequent relapses having occurred. He is now so much better that he will likely be well in three or four days.

William Traill, M.D.  
 in medical charge  
 Seamen's Hospital."

"Annual Report of the Civil Medical Department,  
 Singapore, for the years 1849/1850.<sup>8</sup>

*Returns of admissions and deaths (1.4.1849 — 31.3.1850)*

	European Seamen's Hospital	Jail Hospital	Tan Tock Seng Hospital and Lunatic Asylum
Bubo.		3 (treated)	
Gonorrhoea.		4 (treated)	
Syphilis Primitiva	5 (treated)	15 (treated)	
Syphilis Consecutiva	10 (treated)	7 (treated)	2 (treated)
		1 (transferred)	1 (died) "

It was not until 1858 that there was some public agitation for the control of prostitution and the establishment of a hospital for the treatment of venereal diseases. The Grand Jury also advocated the registration and regular medical examination of prostitutes:<sup>9</sup>

"... The Grand Jurors further present the frightful injury to the public health which arises from the prevalence of prostitution in the settlement. They are of opinion this evil also demands the immediate interference of the Executive. They also recommend as absolutely necessary the establishment of a Lock Hospital to which diseased persons may be removed and where they may be attended and cured. They also urge the adoption of some system of registration such as they understand prevails in Continental India and on the continent of Europe by which prostitutes are brought under the cognisance of the police and are bound to present themselves at short intervals for examination by properly qualified persons appointed for that purpose, and the Grand Jurors are of opinion that for the support of such a hospital and system of registration, etc. it would be right to exact a fee for a certificate of health which ought to be granted after such examination."

The Recorder in forwarding the Presentment of the Grand Jury to the Governor added his comments. He agreed with the suggestion that the establishment of a Lock Hospital would be an efficient means of checking the spread of venereal diseases, and he believed that

powers for compelling the removal of affected persons to the hospital would be readily granted by the Legislative Council of India under proper restrictions.<sup>10</sup>

The Governor, however, was not so hopeful:<sup>11</sup>

"The establishment of a Lock Hospital is one of peculiar difficulty and can only be done by a legislative enactment which I do not feel so confident as Your Honour would be granted . . ."

The Editor of the Straits Times supported the recommendations of the Grand Jury. He felt it was the bounden duty of Government to control and eradicate diseases affecting the health of the native population. As venereal disease was rife among the Chinese, he quoted the success of the Lock Hospital in Hong Kong as an example:<sup>12</sup>

"It will be remembered that the Presentment made by the late Grand Jury pointed out the necessity of establishing a Lock Hospital at Singapore. When we consider the inveterate character and insidious nature of the disease, the proper place of treatment is what is peculiarly known as a Lock Hospital. When we reflect on the widespread influence of the malady, the secrecy and even evasion made with regard to the complaint, and moreover, when we assert what is well known that the disease in its worst form is almost limited to the Chinese population, we are strongly of opinion that the origination and establishment of a Lock Institution belong to the Government and to the Government alone.

To the credit of the 19th century is due the establishment of Governmental, municipal and parochial institutions immediately connected with the education, progress and health of the inhabitants. These great points are no longer left to private institutions or contributions. They are purely national in character, application and use, and it behoves Government and more particularly the rulers of a native or Asiatic population to provide the means of curing and eradicating diseases of the most vital character affecting the health and amount of population.

From the following extract taken from the 'Friend of China', it would appear that a Lock Asylum has been established at Hong Kong with success: 'The success of the Government Lock Hospital has been most signal, the rooms being crowded, indeed Dr. Menzies has found it necessary to engage an assistant to look after the patients, generously donating all the pay of his office so that justice may be done to them.' . . . "

Singapore during the period under review, was a settlement predominantly of men and transient immigrants. In 1860, the population was 81,734 and the proportion of Chinese was 61 percent. 85.8 percent of the total population and 93.5 percent of the Chinese population were males, i.e. out of 81,734 people, about 11,000 were females, and out of about 50,000 Chinese only about 3,000 were females. Moreover, only 10 percent of the population were children, and these were mainly among the Europeans and Malays.

Worsening conditions in China as a result of the Taiping rebellion led to increasing numbers of peasants emigrating as indentured labour ("slaves" would be a more appropriate term) all over the world. Singapore was the distribution centre for South East Asia. In 1863, a small trickle of Chinese women immigrants began. There were hopes that the increasing numbers of women in the population would act as a stabilising and settling influence on the hordes of men. But it was realised by the end of that year that most of the women had been imported by the Secret Societies for prostitution, and this in later years was to lead to crime, breaches of the peace and more disease.<sup>13</sup>

*"The disturbances in China seem to be now effecting what has long been felt as a great desideratum in Singapore — an increase to the female part of the population. Many of the traders are being joined by their wives and families and will therefore have less inducement than heretofore to pay periodical visits to China. They may come gradually, having their families with them, to regard Singapore less as a place of merely temporary sojourn and may acquire a home feeling for it. Female immigration on a more extensive scale is also not wanting. A ship lately arrived from China brought some seventy or eighty female passengers. These may not, perhaps, be the most desirable additions to our population, but it is to be hoped that in time the descriptions of females coming from China in a wholesale way may improve, and that even of the present immigrants, many may find facilities for turning to a regular mode of life and becoming good domestic housewives. From what we know of the state of feeling both in China and Japan on these points, there is much less difficulty in such things taking place amongst the Chinese than in European countries."*

But trouble started soon, and there were gang fights among the Secret Societies and various Chinese clans over the women. Concerned citizens wrote to the newspapers demanding that Government put a stop to this exploitation of young girls which led to crime, vice, disease and death. Attention was drawn to Government apathy by the fact that the worst and most notorious areas where prostitution flourished were near the main police station.<sup>14</sup>

*"In a recent issue, you noticed the arrival of a number of females from China, congratulating the Settlement on the beginning thus made to the much wanted increase in the female part of the population. I would gladly join you in this feeling if I thought that 'many may find facilities for turning to a regular mode of life and becoming good domestic housewives', but I know the sad degraded life these poor unfortunate girls are made to lead here.*

*Instead of being, as may be generally supposed, habituated to prostitution, I believe that the majority of these unfortunate creatures are initiated to it here, and forced by their owners to continue it. I have seen many of these recent arrivals — what are they? Chiefly girls from 16-18 years of age either lured to Singapore by the glowing accounts of fortune to be acquired or brought by their keepers, but in either case when they land here they are neither more nor less than slaves to be bought and sold.*

*Here, there is no society for the protection of young females, but it is truly the duty of Government to look to this, and it is a disgrace to the Police that such things should be, aye, and be within a few hundred yards of the Head Station, the worst localities being Hong Kong and Carpenter Streets. The Police cannot be ignorant that in these streets are houses of 5, 10, 20, I have heard 50, and even a larger number of women, close prisoners, who must at the will of their keepers, prostitute their persons to all comers.*

*I will not here dwell into the question of the Vice, Crime, Disease and Death there bred; but there is one view of this evil which demands and deserves the immediate and earnest attention of Government. It is that many of these women are brought here on behalf of the Secret Societies in order to extend their influence and power. . . . Gang fights among Societies and Chinese clans which had their origin in a quarrel about a woman. . . . This gives great significance to this immigration.*

*Few imagine the number of these unfortunate Chinese women now in the Settlement. I have heard it estimated at 2000-2500, which I believe is not far from correct. . . . A monstrous fact is that you or I or anyone so disposed can in the vicinity of the principal police station buy one, or if we choose, 100 women, at prices ranging from \$100 to \$400 each."*

The Editor of the Singapore Free Press commented:<sup>14</sup> *"The statements made by our correspondent are deserving the serious attention of the Government and we trust will receive it. If matters are as therein represented, and we have very little doubt but they will be found so, it is certainly the duty of a civilised government to interfere so as to prevent a system of slave dealing so revolting in its details and fraught with such dire consequences to the health of the population, from being perserved in. From what we have heard we have reason to believe that the*

*Secret Societies are mixed up with these importations of females, and that the recent rows in part arisen from disputes regarding them."*

There was no action taken, and the disgusted correspondent wrote again to the Singapore Free Press and taunted the Government to run a slave and prostitution monopoly:<sup>15</sup>

*"A month has passed after drawing attention to the fact of the female immigrants — in vain.*

*In the interval, about 100 more have landed for the purpose of being devoted to the most abominable of all slavery, the hiring out by their owners of the persons of these women for the purpose of prostitution.*

*The Authorities should take action to stop this traffic, otherwise there will be contempt of the law and great power will be placed in the hands of the chiefs of the Secret Societies. This will lead to trouble in future . . . The Police must have been bribed.*

*Might as well in addition to the proposed Gambling Farm, have a Slave-dealing and Prostitution Farm."*

This article will not touch on the steps taken by Government to control Chinese Secret Societies and Chinese immigration. There are excellent monographs on these subjects. It will only record attempts to solve one of the most difficult medico-social problems, venereal diseases and prostitution.

Singapore, a British Colony (as other parts of the Empire), was affected and influenced by events in Great Britain. In the 19th century, unbridled extra-marital sexual activity was considered sinful and venereal disease, the wages of sin. This intolerant religious and moral attitude, moreover, was biased against women. For a man, venereal disease was evidence of profligacy. For a woman, it was an offence against God and man to be punished.

Victorian sanctimoniousness was coupled with insensitivity and harshness of the law. In 1864, the British Government passed the Contagious Diseases Act in an attempt to curb the high rates of venereal disease among sailors and soldiers. Present-day women would find in this Act, gross infringement of the "human rights" of their sex.

This Act was "for the Prevention of Contagious Diseases at certain Naval and Military Stations", and Contagious Disease was defined as "Venereal Disease including Gonorrhoea". In Victorian times, "venereal disease" was unmentionable and unprintable.

The Act authorised the establishment of special hospitals for the medical examination of women and their detention for treatment of venereal diseases. It empowered Police Inspectors and Superintendents or any Medical Practitioner to inform a Justice of the Peace if "he had good cause to believe that a woman was a common prostitute and had a Contagious Disease, and within fourteen days of the information was in a public place in which the Act applied". The Justice of the Peace, if he thought fit, might order such woman to be taken to a Certified Hospital for medical examination. If the woman did not submit willingly, the Police had authority to apprehend her and bring her to hospital for examination. If the woman was found to have venereal disease, she was to be detained for twenty-four hours in the hospital, during which time, the Medical Officer who made the examination, would send a certificate to the Justice of the Peace,

who would then issue an order to the hospital authorities to detain the woman for treatment until discharged, or for a maximum period of three months.

There were provisions for punishing by imprisonment women who refused to be examined, or stay in hospital, or to conform to hospital regulations. One Section empowered Justices of the Peace to fine or imprison persons who permitted prostitutes with venereal disease to use their premises for prostitution.

No wonder many people, especially the feminists, were up in arms. It is surprising that the medical profession did not protest the blatant disregard of medical ethics. It is unthinkable today that a registered medical practitioner would report women suspected of being prostitutes and of having venereal disease to a Justice of the Peace; examine a woman without her consent; keep her in hospital for twenty-four hours if she has venereal disease, in the meantime getting an Order authorising her detention for treatment against her wishes. Medical ethics must have been different then.

In Singapore, public-spirited people were also caught up in the reforming zeal of the times. Prostitution was one problem they tackled. The magnitude of the problem, the traffic in women and girls and a proposal to legalise prostitution with proper controls, was the subject of a leader in the Singapore Free Press of 31st August 1865:<sup>16</sup>

*"Prostitution in Singapore has within the last ten years made most gigantic strides, more particularly amongst the Chinese population which probably amounts in the aggregate to about 60,000 souls. This prostitution is not confined to any particular locality, but the great rendezvous for Chinese prostitution is Hong Kong and Carpenter Streets where so many as fifty women in one single house are kept to follow this body and soul-polluting vice. We now proceed to notice the method by which these unfortunate (in every sense of the word) women are conveyed here from China. It is well-known to the majority of our readers that the price of rice in China during the past few years has been gradually increasing, until for the Chinese, it has been fabulously high. The Taping rebellion has also assisted to impoverish the poorer classes of the Chinese to such a degree that they are willing to part with their female relatives for a trifling money consideration in order not only to supply their own immediate wants, but also to be exonerated from the burden of their support.*

*It is not, however, so generally known that a general system of traffic in human souls is carried on by a certain class of Chinese in Singapore who make periodical trips to China which result in their conveying hither female adults and young children who are educated both by precept and example to lead a life which they do not disown . . . The female Chinese population who are known prostitutes at the present moment, number upwards of 2,500, which is in the proportion of one for every 24 of the Chinese inhabitants. What is the natural consequence of this enormous inequality? Disease in its most loathsome form stalks through our highways and byeways every hour of the day and senses are continually shocked by appearances which are repulsive.*

*What is the remedy for all this is the natural question. Now, we are perfectly aware we are about to tread upon what may be termed delicate ground, but we fearlessly assert that the remedy would be found in the issue of*

*proper licences for a certain number of houses and the appointment of a Health Officer to take cognisance of the state of health of these necessary evils as well as to see that the present system of crowding 100 souls into sleeping apartments whose accommodation would not suffice for 20, is at once put a stop to. As a mere matter of finance, it is of course the lowest light from which we can view it; as a question of health and hygiene, our experience and observation which have been by no means circumscribed, lead us to the conclusion that it would be the means of saving many human lives."*

The topic of legalising brothels and prostitution was frequently raised in the newspapers, often in relation to the increasing crime rate:<sup>7</sup>

*"... It turned out to be a case of stabbing and wounding. It occurred in one of those miserable Chinese brothels, in which most of the women are forced into this line of life by their owners, who obtain all the profits; and if this is a necessary evil, we opine, that some more stringent rules ought to be enacted for the better surveillance of such places than are now in force. The establishments are managed on the Continent of Europe on a more systematical principle than in any other country. There, Government appoints medical overseers and the police always have their eyes upon such places, and by these arrangements there is better protection for health and life. . . ."*

In the United Kingdom, as a result of violent protests that decent women were subjected to harassment and embarrassment by the working of the 1864 Act, a new Contagious Diseases Act was passed on 11th June 1866 which repealed the 1864 Act. It is interesting and amusing to study its provisions as the Act was later used as a model for similar laws in various parts of the Empire, including Singapore.

In the new Act, medical practitioners were not involved in reporting to the Justices of the Peace. The Police Superintendent reported "if he had good cause to believe that the woman was a common prostitute". (No mention of venereal disease). If the Justice of the Peace was satisfied that the information was correct, he could "order that the woman be subject to a periodical medical examination by the Visiting Surgeon for any period not exceeding one year, for the purpose of ascertaining at the time of each such examination whether she was affected with a contagious disease". The time and place of the examination was to be specified. The woman was not to be straightaway taken to a Certified Hospital. Any woman could also submit herself voluntarily to periodical medical examination. After the first examination, the Visiting Surgeon would have to specify the times and places of the subsequent examinations. If at any such examination, a woman was found to have venereal disease, she was liable to be admitted into a Certified Hospital. If she refused admission, then she was liable to be arrested by the police and brought to the hospital. Once in hospital, a woman could be detained up to six months. But if she was discharged uncured and was later found prostituting herself, she was liable to be imprisoned. If a woman considered herself entitled to be discharged and the Surgeon refused, she could appeal to the Justice of the Peace, who, if satisfied on medical evidence that she was free from venereal disease, could discharge her. The punishment for women who refused to be examined, who

absconded from hospital or refused to conform to hospital regulations, was made harsher. It was not just imprisonment, but imprisonment with or without hard labour. If a woman wished to be relieved from periodical medical examination, she could apply to the Justice of the Peace, who, if satisfied that she had ceased to be a common prostitute, or if the woman entered into a recognizance with or without sureties for her good behaviour for three months, could order that she be exempted from medical examinations. Of course, a return to prostitution would subject her to the law again. There was the same provision for punishing owners of premises allowing infected women to use their premises for prostitution, but the maximum term of imprisonment was increased from three months to six months. There was also provision for children born in the Certified Hospitals. But the most amusing section (to our modern eyes) was the one which imposed conditions before a hospital could be recognised as a Certified Hospital. It had to provide, in addition to medical treatment, moral and religious teaching:

*"A Hospital shall not be certified under this Act unless at the time of the granting of a Certificate adequate provision is made for the Moral and Religious Instruction of the Women detained therein under this Act; and if at any subsequent time it appears to the Admiralty or the Secretary of State for War that in any such Hospital adequate provision for that purpose is not made, the Certificate of that Hospital shall be withdrawn."*

Under the new Act, the doctors were still involved in examining and treating women without their valid consent, though they no longer acted as informers.

In Hong Kong, the Contagious Diseases Ordinance was the tenth Ordinance passed in 1867, on 23rd July. This Ordinance dealt with two matters, common prostitutes and licensing of brothels. The provisions dealing with common prostitutes were similar to those of the Imperial Act; most of those dealing with brothels were later copied by Singapore (see below). Some were not copied, e.g. the sections forbidding children between the ages of eight and fifteen to stay in brothels, and compelling keepers to reside in their brothels. The sections concerning "outdoor prostitution" were also left out. One, because local conditions were different. The Hong Kong Ordinance had provisions dealing with "floating brothels" and the prostitutes in them. "Every woman who shall be found on board of any junk, boat, sampan or craft of any kind or description within colonial waters for the purpose of prostitution . . . Every person apparently in charge of any junk, boat, sampan or craft when any woman shall be found therein for the purpose of prostitution . . ." The other, for a rather stupid reason (see below) — "Every woman who shall be found in any street, road or other place . . . for the purposes of prostitution . . ."

The Indian Contagious Diseases Act (XIV of 1868) was passed on 17th April 1868. It prohibited, under penalty, the carrying on of the business of a common prostitute or of a brothel keeper without registration. It authorised the Government to make regulations for the registration of prostitutes and brothel keepers, and provided a penalty against brothel keepers for permitting unregistered prostitutes to resort to their brothels. It empowered Government to make rules for the medical examination of registered prostitutes and provided a penalty for in-

fraction of rules. It also empowered Government to provide hospitals for the purpose of the Act, and obliged infected prostitutes to go into hospital, and authorised their detention in hospital until discharged by the medical officer. The treatment was to be gratis; and there was a penalty for leaving the hospital before discharge. Government was empowered to provide for out-door treatment of registered prostitutes, and the Act subjected women to a penalty for conducting themselves as prostitutes whilst still infected. It also authorised Government to prohibit residence of prostitutes in any street or place specified; and to provide for the removal of any prostitute's name from the register book.

Singapore was not slow to follow suit. The Singapore Ordinance was modelled on the Hong Kong one, which was an adaptation of the British Act to local conditions.

The British Act was amended again in 1869 and became known as the Contagious Diseases Act, 1866-1869. It dealt only with common prostitutes in and around certain military and naval stations who were known to the police. The Indian Act enforced the registration of common prostitutes and brothel keepers. The Singapore Bill when first introduced in the Legislative Council dealt with the registration of brothel keepers and the medical supervision of common prostitutes, similar to the Hong Kong Ordinance. But when it became law, the sections concerning common prostitutes had been deleted. (For the reason, see below). There were also special provisions regarding seamen, especially those infected with venereal diseases, as in the Hong Kong Ordinance.

We will now trace the events which led to the passing of the Singapore Ordinance.

On 24th February 1869, in the Legislative Council, the Hon. W. H. Read moved for leave to introduce a Bill to prevent the spread of certain Contagious Diseases,<sup>18</sup> and on 24th May 1869, he gave notice that on the next day of meeting he would move the second reading of the Contagious Diseases Bill.<sup>19</sup>

At the Legislative Council meeting held on 31st May 1869, Mr. Read proposed the second reading of his Bill.<sup>20</sup> He said he had introduced that Bill because of late years, there had been a great increase in the population, and although there was an improvement in the disparity between the sexes, at the same time, there was a great increase of disease, and a contagious disease was much more serious in a tropical climate than in England. There were so many European soldiers and sailors in the Settlement that he thought it was desirable that some measures, such as were in force in Hong Kong and where they had answered so well, should be adopted and introduced in Singapore. A great part of the Bill was an exact copy of the Hong Kong Ordinance. When he was in Hong Kong in 1867, he had discussed the problem with Hong Kong officials who gave him a great deal of valuable information, and he could only say that as far as the state of disease went, Hong Kong had wonderfully benefited by the law. The Captain of one of Her Majesty's Ships lying in the roadstead had told him that whereas in Hong Kong during three months, he had not a single man on the sick list; in a fortnight at Singapore, he had nineteen. He considered the Bill a measure both important and necessary under the circumstances of the Colony, and he added that it had received the approval of every medical man to whom he had spoken on the subject.

The Governor in reply said he proposed to tell the Council at once the course he intended to adopt with reference to the Bill. He concurred with Mr Read that it was very desirable, because of the presence of a force of European soldiers and the large number of sailors who frequented the port, that precautions should be taken. If the provisions in the Bill were limited to the course which was pursued in Britain and which worked with great success there, he would have no objections, but Mr Read was of the opinion that more should be done and instanced the case of Hong Kong where they had gone much further, though not as far as in India. In India, they had gone to the very extreme that had ever been contemplated in Europe and far beyond what was necessary and desirable for Singapore. The Governor was not prepared to say that Singapore should not go as far as Hong Kong, but he required more information before he could acquiesce in the proposal. He thought that information could be obtained with the assistance of the medical men and the police whose senior officers were very well-informed on the subject. It would be very possible to ascertain the length to which it was desirable to go, and he proposed that the Bill might with advantage be referred to a Select Committee.

The Bill was read a second time, after which, Mr Read stating that he had no objection, the Attorney-General moved that the Bill be referred to a Select Committee to consist of the Attorney-General, the Honourable Messrs Read, Brown and Scott. This was seconded by Mr Read and agreed to. Two other members were added at the meeting of 22nd July 1869,<sup>21</sup> the Lt-Governors of Penang and Malacca.

The Report of the Select Committee on the Contagious Diseases Bill was brought up at the Legislative Council meeting on 3rd October 1870, and read by the Clerk at the table:<sup>22</sup>

*"All the Medical men, the Police officers, and many of the principal Chinese consulted, were of opinion that the provisions of the Bill would decidedly prove of great public advantage in a sanitary point of view.*

*Although, at first, there might exist a disinclination to submit to the requirements of the Act, and some of those coming under its control might leave the Colony, still it appeared to be the general opinion that they would gradually conform with the regulations, provided these were not harshly enforced at the commencement.*

*It would appear from the evidence obtained, that the Chinese women are not free agents in many instances. They cannot leave their houses unattended, and every impediment is placed in their way to prevent them laying any complaint of detention or ill-treatment before a Magistrate. Moreover, most of, if not all, the Chinese brothels are under the protection and control of the Secret Societies, and heavy sums of money are obtained from the inmates in support of the principal Hoeyes. . . .*

*In conclusion, your Committee, considering the object of the Bill to be of great public importance, recommend it to the earnest consideration of the Legislative Council."*

The Committee also referred to the experience of the Hong Kong Lock Hospital (average 20 patients a day). The salaries of the staff in 1867 amounted to \$1777. The patients were charged 10 cents a day for medicines, food, etc., but the cost of feeding them was 11 cents a day. The hospital charges did not even cover the cost of food, but

those fees added to the licence fees produced a revenue much above the cost of the whole establishment including the cost of the building. They estimated that it would cost \$4500 per year to run a Lock Hospital of 50 beds in Singapore. The cost of building the hospital would be \$7500. The estimates were based on the number of prostitutes in Singapore. In 1867, there were 1580 known Chinese prostitutes and 874 other nationalities; in 1868, there were 1644 and 408 respectively.

The Contagious Diseases Bill was re-introduced, and Mr Read moved that the Standing Orders be suspended and the Bill was read a first time and ordered to be printed.

The Bill was published in the Government Gazette of 21st October 1870 for general information.<sup>23</sup> The Editor of the Straits Times wrote an article stressing the need for such a law to protect the poor Chinese women and to alleviate their miserable plight. He also drew attention to the power and influence of the Secret Societies, but cautioned against too drastic action against them as the Societies were in a position to unite and oppose the Government and start an insurrection. There were 54,000 Chinese (90% men) in a population of 97,000.

*"The Legislative Council has under consideration a Contagious Diseases Bill which we believe is an adaptation of the Hong Kong Ordinance to this Colony. The social objections that have been recently urged against a similar measure in England do not apply here. The object of the Bill is to better the condition of the unfortunate women who fall under its provisions. The Select Committee appointed to inquire into and report upon the Bill say very truly that most of the women are not free agents and are not allowed to go out except under guardianship. The truth is that the Chinese women brought here from Hong Kong and China are slaves, and this alone explains why they are not free agents. Representing, as each of them does, a certain sum of money, they are carefully watched lest by some means they become aware of their freedom and their privileges, and endeavour to assert their rights . . . Fearing lest some of them may find protectors, the powerful Hoeyes are called in to protect the owners from loss; and thus any person attempting to entice one of the women raises up against himself a powerful enemy that scruples at nothing to regain possession of her. When one does escape, an attempt is made, frequently with success, to forcibly abduct her from her place of refuge, and she is then severely punished for her temerity, and the Chinese bold enough to rescue one of these girls from bondage is fortunate if he escapes injury to life or limb. When, as frequently happens, the aggressor is a member of another Secret Society, then follows a quarrel between the two Societies, which, unless settled by the payment of the money value or the restoration of the human property, ripens into a serious disturbance.*

*It cannot be expected that the passing of this Bill will at once remedy all these evils, but it will have the effect of gradually raising the women from that condition of abject slavery in which they are at present kept, and will teach them by degrees that there are other than Chinese laws to be observed. As it is, even though they may be aware of their rights, they dare not assert them for fear of the Hoey under whose 'protection' they may be. Under these circumstances, too, they dare not refuse to obey the orders of their masters and mistresses, and consequently*

*there is a pressing need for the law to step in and regulate the establishments, and to provide against the evils which are the necessary consequence of the present system of terrorism. To liberate them all by force is inadvisable, if not impracticable, and would have the effect of either driving them out of the Colony, or of creating a serious riot in our midst, in which it is possible all the Secret Societies might unite against the Government. The only feasible plan, therefore, seems to be the passing of an Ordinance like the Bill before the Council, and which we trust, will become law during the present session."<sup>24</sup>*

The Bill was read a second time on 11th November 1870, when the Standing Orders were suspended and the Bill was committed.<sup>25</sup> The Council resumed committee on 17th<sup>26</sup> and 28th<sup>27</sup> November when the remaining sections were considered, and the Bill reported with amendments. It was read a third time at the Legislative Council meeting of 1st December 1870 and passed<sup>28</sup> (Ordinance XXIII of 1870).

Some mention will be made of the amendments to the Bill and the provisions as they finally appeared in the Ordinance.

The Bill to prevent the spread of certain Contagious Diseases had 53 sections, whereas the Ordinance had only 44. There were a number of significant amendments. Seven sections relating to common prostitutes (as in the Imperial Act and the Hong Kong Ordinance) had been deleted. This was because it had been decided that decent women should not run the risk of being harassed and tormented by the police and be made to suffer indignities in public. The section imposing a limit to the period of detention in a hospital (as in the Imperial Act) had also been deleted. The women were to be detained until discharged by the Medical Officer as in the Indian Act. Native women were to be treated more harshly. The Contagious Diseases Ordinance dealt mainly with Chinese brothels and the women in them. The main provisions of the Ordinance were: All keepers of brothels were to be registered, after which they would be granted licences to keep brothels. A register of inmates of each brothel was to be kept, and no keeper of a licensed brothel was to allow any woman to resort to or be at his/her brothel for the purpose of prostitution unless such woman was on the list. The keeper had to give notice to the Visiting Surgeon when any woman was suspected of having a contagious disease, and not permit her to prostitute herself in the brothel until medically examined by the Surgeon. Any keeper omitting to give notice to the Surgeon and any woman continuing to prostitute herself before such examination would be guilty of an offence under the Ordinance. If any person was proved to have been infected in a licensed brothel, the keeper was liable to be fined and the prostitute fined or imprisoned. However, if a client was proved to have infected an inmate of a licensed brothel, he was liable to be fined or imprisoned! Every licensed brothel was liable to be inspected and the Police were empowered to enter unlicensed brothels and arrest their keepers and inmates. Every inmate of a licensed brothel was liable to medical examination by the Visiting Surgeon. Any woman (presumably, including non-inmates and free-lance prostitutes) might submit voluntarily to medical examination. When, after medical examination, a woman was declared infected, the Surgeon could direct her to be taken to a special hospital

set aside for the treatment of venereal diseases. If the woman refused to go, the Police had powers to arrest her and bring her to hospital. Expenses in hospital were to be paid by the keeper. The woman was to be detained in hospital until discharged, but if she considered that she should be discharged but was refused by the Surgeon, she was at liberty to appeal to the Registering Officer. There were penalties for refusing to be examined, for absconding from hospital, for refusing to obey hospital regulations.

There were also special provisions regarding seamen. Every Keeper of a licensed Boarding House for Seamen and the Manager of every Sailors' Home had to furnish to the Harbour Master once a week a list of seamen resident in his house, and report the state of health of each seaman. Every seaman reported or discovered to have a contagious disease would be removed under warrant under the hand of the Harbour Master to hospital where he would be detained until discharged as cured. All expenses in hospital were to be paid by the sailor. If a seaman refused to go to hospital, or absconded from hospital, or neglected to inform the Keeper of his Boarding House or the Manager of his Sailors' Home that he had a contagious disease, he was liable to be punished. The provisions were to apply to Apprentices and Officers in addition to seamen of the merchant ships.

The Ordinance was forwarded to the Secretary of State for the Colonies for his approval on 15th December 1870. The Governor wrote:<sup>29</sup>

*"The Ordinance does not, I think, require any observations from me to commend it to Your Lordship's approval. I would only call attention to the nature of the provisions which have been introduced for dealing with the cases of prostitutes, and which I believe will be found to avoid all that have been found objectionable in similar measures passed elsewhere."*

The Editor of the Singapore Daily Times fearing that legalising prostitution in Singapore would demean its leading citizens and subject them to severe censure and condemnation by moralists in England and Europe, wrote an editorial on 13th December 1870. He tried to justify what had been done.<sup>30</sup>

*"Distasteful as is the subject of a Contagious Diseases Ordinance, we should be lacking in our duty as public journalists were we to allow the bill which has just passed to come into operation without touching upon the points which it involves. The law, as it has been placed upon our Statute Book, is shorn of many of those objectionable features which have been so strongly urged against the Home and other laws on the subject, and the power of individuals for maliciously assailing a woman's character, or subjecting her to degradation, is not conferred by it. In fact, we have profited by the experience of other places, and an endeavour has been made to ameliorate the temporal condition of those who fall under its provisions, without at the same time exposing virtuous women to the danger of annoyance. We imagine there are few in our community who will cavil at the law that has been passed, or deem the moral atmosphere of the place tainted by a measure legalising, so to speak, the worst of social evils. . . . For the information of those abroad unacquainted with the state of our native society, and as a sort of palliation for the action that has been taken by the Council, it is therefore necessary, in order to justify the*

*passing of this Ordinance in the eyes of Europeans elsewhere, particularly of those who strongly oppose the Home measure, whose good opinion we should be sorry to lose, to explain some of the leading causes which have influenced its introduction . . .*

*It is evident, in the first place, that the system which prevails in China of the sale of women and female children extends to this and every other place where the Chinese settle in large numbers, and that all the Chinese women brought here from China must have been purchased there. It by no means follows that they are in the first place kidnapped, for among the poorer classes a female child is considered as legitimately saleable, and frequently comeliness is regarded by its parents principally in the relation it bears to the market value. The working classes and artisans obtain their wives by purchase, and may divorce them at will; and many a mother will part with a child from the breast without a feeling of sorrow or a question as to its future fate, as long as she receives what she deems a fair money equivalent. The children thus sold become the absolute property of their purchasers, and must obey them in all things until either sold or given to some one else, or they purchase their own freedom. Thus it is that as our law does not sanction slavery in any form, after the women arrive here they are kept under close surveillance lest by chance they learn of their rights, or should they learn of them, seek to avail of them.*

*The protection of the strong Secret Societies serves usually as a safeguard against enticing away the women by the Chinese; any instance of this sort is visited with dire vengeance, and others are chary of making like attempts. Further, the fact that these Hoeyes are so intimately mixed up in the affairs of these establishments (brothels) might render abortive any attempt on the part of Government to free the women from bondage. Certainly, difficulties would be placed in the way, and most of the women would be taken out of the Colony, and serious riots might result. Even were such an attempt successful, the success would occasion possibly a greater evil than the present. The presence of these women serves to prevent worse evils, for before their advent, robberies and crimes of violence were of alarming frequency. What the Government aim at, is not to take measures which will have the effect of driving them away, but to better their temporal condition, and to make some provision for the preservation of their health and cleanliness, which is absolutely necessary, to protect that of the native community at large. The women are not allowed to act for themselves, are provided only with Chinese doctors and Chinese medicines, and the consequence is that sanitary regulation and medical supervision must be provided by statute in order to ensure a decrease of the evil.*

*There is also another class not affected by this Ordinance, and for whom, though 'free agents', quite as stringent regulation is necessary. We mean those native women, who, their standard of morality being low, easily fall into a disreputable mode of life, and thenceforward follow it from direst necessity.*

*The Ordinance confers upon the Government the privilege of appointing the place for these establishments. We trust that they will not then be located, as now, in our principal thoroughfares, and that our most fashionable drives will not be marred by shameless exhibitions. . . ."*

*It must not be imagined that there were no opponents*



to this move to legalise prostitution in Singapore. There were, but they had decided not to be militant but to wait for future events to vindicate the wisdom of taking such a measure. However, they wanted the press as the public watchdog to ensure that proper statistics were kept and honestly presented, as this letter to the Editor of the Singapore Daily Times shows:<sup>31</sup>

*"The tone and leaning of a late article which appeared in your columns on this new law, must have been acceptable to the opponents of such legislation. It was a conciliatory article and wise on that account, as the controversy, both at Home and elsewhere, has been unhappily bitter. There are opponents of the new Ordinance in the Colony, but they have arrived at a point where, instead of resisting, they deem it better to allow practical experience of the working of the new law to speak for itself. They, however, confidently look to your aid in obtaining the full and free publication of all statistics on the subject. The Home statistics have been questioned on all sides, for results have been claimed by both supporters and opponents of such legislation as proving their opinions . . . Give your assistance to obtain statistics, and you will strengthen the position of the right side on this most important question."*

The letter was signed "IMPARTIAL".

In March 1871, the Government was taken to task for not putting the Ordinance into operation.<sup>32</sup> It was realised that the obstacles to quick implementation of the law were the bondage of the women and the terrorism of the Secret Societies. "We have little doubt these facts weigh heavily with the Government, and make it hesitate to attempt the working of the Ordinance, but they are great and crying public evils, and it is the duty of the Government to grapple with and overcome them. . . . Having passed the Ordinance, to bring it into operation as soon as practicable, lest its other laws be brought into contempt among the Chinese section of the community. . . . The connection between the brothels and the Secret Societies is one of the chief sources of the power and the influence of these organisations, and anything which tended to lessen the restraint under which the women are now placed would also lessen the influence of the Societies over them. If this influence is lessened, a heavy blow would be dealt at the power of the Societies themselves, as one of their chief sources of emolument and support would be withdrawn. . . ." It was some time before the Ordinance was put into operation (see below).

The acting Governor received an unexpected reply to his despatch from the Secretary of State.<sup>33</sup> The Ordinance was approved, but the Secretary of State queried the absence of provisions for the medical examination of common prostitutes which were in the Hong Kong Ordinance. This reply reached Singapore in April 1871, hence the criticism of delay in implementation was unfair.

On receipt of the Secretary of State's query, the acting Governor directed a new Ordinance to be drafted to rectify the omission pointed out by His Lordship and to include some changes. His Lordship was duly informed.<sup>34</sup>

At the time when the Contagious Diseases Ordinance 1870 was under consideration, the Legislative Council was to a certain extent swayed by the opinions of persons of station and influence in Britain against the principle of recognising prostitution, and against the danger of giving to Police Officers the power of bringing before the

Magistrates respectable women under pretence of their being prostitutes, and the Council confined the operation of the Ordinance within narrow limits, in fact confined it to women living openly in common brothels. However, there was an oversight in that the word "brothel" was too loosely defined as "any house or place occupied or used by any woman for the purpose of prostitution", so that any woman was subject to Police harassment and prosecution without the safeguard provided by the Imperial Act and the Hong Kong Ordinance. Thus the Singapore Ordinance, while at first sight very limited in its operation, was really open to serious objections. By 1871, public opinion in Britain had changed, and it was assumed that the law in Singapore could be extended to include all common brothels and all women openly living as prostitutes. Instead of amending the existing Ordinance by the introduction of new Sections, it was decided that it would be better to repeal the existing one and enact a new Ordinance on more extended principles and correcting all "mistakes". The draft of the proposed new Ordinance was published in the Government Gazette of 5th June 1871.<sup>35</sup>

When he received the acting Governor's despatch, the Secretary of State sent a telegram on 7th June 1871: "You need not introduce ordinance to amend the Contagious Diseases Ordinance".<sup>36</sup> This was followed by a despatch explaining his change of mind. The Governor, Sir Harry Ord, who was on leave in England, had given him this advice: "women do not frequent the streets for prostitution, the proceeding being opposed to the feelings and customs of the Chinese and native populations!"<sup>37</sup>

The acting Governor wrote on 14th June 1871<sup>38</sup> to acknowledge receipt of the Secretary of State's telegram, and explained that the existing Ordinance was defective in other provisions besides the one pointed out by His Lordship, and said that the new draft Ordinance had already passed the second reading in the Legislative Council. He hoped that permission would be granted for him to get the new law passed.

The Editor of the Singapore Daily Times continued to urge the Government to put into operation the Contagious Diseases Ordinance as soon as possible, for the sake of ameliorating the condition of the miserable Chinese women:<sup>39</sup>

*"Circumstances that have come to light within the last few days reveal the fact that here in Singapore, under British law, flourishes a system of slavery, of oppression and terrorism, that elsewhere would awaken a storm of righteous indignation, and arouse the sympathies of entire nations. The unbridled brutality and even horrible torture practised upon the inmates of the Chinese brothels would be past belief but for the unmistakable evidence of informations on oath, which are from time to time laid before the magistrate and police. The cause of the inhuman treatment of these poor women is usually insubordination, or attempts to escape from the degrading thralldom in which they are held; and the punishment inflicted is sometimes fearful. Today, a miserable creature was brought to the police court, and gave information of the treatment to which she had been subjected, the details of which are so horribly disgusting as to be unfit for publication, but which, if proved, should hasten the day when these establishments shall be placed under proper supervision, and a check put upon the refined torture and protracted punishments inflicted upon*

*the inmates by these inhuman traffickers in human flesh and blood . . . We are glad to learn that one of her torturers has been arrested, and it is to be hoped for the sake of humanity, and for the supremacy of English law, that all who have aided and abetted in it will be brought to the bar of justice, and made an example that will be a warning to all of their class."*

Some preliminary spade-work had in fact been done by the Government. When Dr. Anderson, the Assistant Colonial Surgeon, was on leave in the United Kingdom, the Government was prepared to grant him a moderate extension of leave to enable him to study the management of Lock Hospitals in Europe.<sup>40</sup>

When the acting Governor's despatch of 14th June 1871 arrived in London, the Secretary of State immediately sent a telegram on 27th July reiterating his decision: "Proceed no further with the Contagious Diseases Ordinance".<sup>41</sup> The draft Ordinance was withdrawn from the Legislative Council agenda.

There was immediate adverse criticism in the press. The blame was placed on Sir Harry Ord, the Governor, who was not popular, for having given wrong advice to the Secretary of State in London.<sup>42</sup>

*" . . . Now, we are at a loss to conceive why Sir Harry Ord should venture such a sweeping statement as that, unless it were to justify himself for the passing of the law in an incomplete form . . . The assertion of Sir Harry Ord is not true. . . . We suspect, indeed, that Sir Harry does not like to be thought altogether ignorant of the character of the people over whom he has governed . . . But the egotism of a Governor should not be allowed to prevent the Administrator of the Government, aided by the Legislative Council, from rectifying the errors and omissions of an incomplete law. As it stands, the Ordinance contains errors which will be likely to seriously impair its working, and further, will we fear be found exceedingly difficult of introduction, because it is aimed principally at one class of establishments, and the most dangerous of all to deal with, the regular brothels, nearly all of which are under the protection of powerful Secret Societies, who will not readily relinquish their hold upon them.*

*We are not anxious to legalise a social vice, but only to better the condition of a very large number of unfortunate women who are now in the most abject slavery, and another numerous class whose habitations cannot properly be defined as 'brothels', but who are nevertheless in just as great need of periodical medical examination as those against whom the existing law is directed; and to lessen the chances of contagion in a native community where the male far exceeds the female population. If, however, the law is not to be enforced at all, if it is to remain a dead letter as it has done so far, then we fully agree with Earl Kimberley that there is no need of proceeding with it. It is worse than useless for a Government to pass laws if it lacks the moral courage, or has not the power, to enforce them, for it only brings itself into contempt with the native population, who regard it as imbecile and powerless. But if the law is ever to be put into operation, when that time comes let us have a full and matured measure, capable of doing what it professes to do, and not liable to breed jealousies and discontent by placing one class under restriction while affording immunity to others equally reprehensible."*

On 17th August 1871, the Secretary of State asked the

acting Governor how he proposed to carry the Contagious Diseases Ordinance 1870 into effect.<sup>43</sup>

After conferring with the Medical Department, the acting Governor replied to the Secretary of State.<sup>44</sup> It was proposed to put the Ordinance into effect only in Singapore, and not to extend it to Penang nor Malacca until later. It would be necessary to rent a room in some centrally-situated part of the Town where the Medical Officer would inspect prostitutes who presented themselves for examination. Hospital accommodation was estimated to be required for twenty women. This could be sufficiently provided for in the existing female ward of the General Hospital, which was seldom used and was occupied by the Apothecary as his residence, and would be vacated as soon as his new quarters were ready for occupation. It would not be necessary to increase the permanent medical staff, a private practitioner would be employed part-time. But an additional Apothecary, a Matron, a Cook, a Toly and a Peon would be required. Expenses were estimated to be \$2862 per annum, but it was expected that the fees collected under the Ordinance would fully cover the whole cost of carrying out its provisions.

The acting Governor continued:

*" . . . In connection with this Ordinance, there will be two very beneficial effects produced which would not be apparent in a similar law in England.*

*The first is a protection it will afford to the unfortunate women, and the second, the check it will impose on the Secret Societies and on certain disorderly persons who frequently disturb the peace of the Colony.*

*Prostitution among the Chinese is not looked upon by them in the same light as it is by Europeans, and those concerned in it are not considered infamous.*

*The proprietor of a brothel is a merchant of a certain commodity and has nearly the authority of a slave merchant over his stock in trade, and there is no doubt he not only hires out his goods but disposes of and purchases them whenever he may find it advantageous to do so.*

*It may be easily imagined therefore that the women he has in his brothel have very little liberty, and at present, they have no power of making complaints of cruelty or of unlawful detention.*

*Many of these women leave China for a certain sum of money in order to pay off a debt for their family, and in some cases, they come down with their father or mother in order to support them by the earnings of their prostitution.*

*The Ordinance by enforcing inspection will give to these women the means of making complaints and to those who desire it, of changing their course of life. At present, even diseased women are forced to carry on their trade or they would be beaten or turned out to starve.*

*Most of these Chinese brothels are connected with and supported by Kongsees or Secret Societies and generally by the most dangerous ones. Almost all the street rows and disturbances originate in them and at present the Police have no power to enter except with a warrant issued on some special complaint.*

*There are also a number of Samsengs (thugs, ruffians) paid by the brothel keeper, who are kept for no other purpose than fighting, and it was this class of persons that gave the most trouble during the late riot in this Settle-*

ment.

*The Ordinance will enable Police Officers to inspect these houses and make themselves acquainted with all the bad characters who frequent them. . . .*

The acting Governor also said that the general opinion of the members of the Legislative Council including the Chinese member, Mr Whampoa, was strongly opposed to that expressed by Sir Harry Ord regarding women not frequenting the streets for purposes of prostitution.

The Secretary of State referred the acting Governor's despatch to Sir Harry Ord for consideration.<sup>45</sup> Sir Harry agreed with the statements except that regarding additional medical staff. He preferred a full-time officer to superintend the carrying out of the measure. He also pointed out that the acting Governor should have mentioned that one of the chief grounds on which the subject was brought before the Legislature by Mr W H Read (to whose persistence the passing of the law was mainly due) was the injury inflicted by the spread of contagious diseases amongst the population.

The Secretary of State authorised the appointment of an additional Surgeon if expedient for the purpose of carrying out the Ordinance into effect. He assumed that the regulations to be made under the Ordinance would be adapted from those in Hong Kong, but warned against abuses by the Police.<sup>46</sup>

*. . . As an Ordinance of the same nature has been found to produce good results at Hong Kong, it may be fairly expected that the regulations will be adapted to the Straits Settlements where the existence of a large Chinese population renders the circumstances very similar to those of the former Colony, but it is obvious that such regulations require to be most vigilantly watched by the Government to prevent abuses of the powers entrusted to the Police either in the shape of oppression or connivance, and I am to request that full reports may be furnished . . .*

As usual, the Press were more sanguine than the Government.<sup>46</sup>

*"We understand the Government is about to put the Contagious Diseases Ordinance into operation, working by degrees so as not to excite opposition. As the object is only to benefit those who will be affected by it, there is no ground for alarm, or for serious opposition to it."*

On 15th August 1872, two Orders of the Governor-in-Council were passed.<sup>47</sup> The Contagious Diseases Ordinance 1870 was to come into operation on the 2nd day of September 1872 "in that portion of the Town of Singapore on the right bank of the Singapore River, contained within the limits of the lithographed map of the town and environs issued from the Surveyor-General's Office in 1868." (the part of the Town occupied mainly by the Chinese). It was also ordered that the keeper of every licensed brothel was to pay 50 cents monthly "for every woman residing in his house for the purpose of prostitution". And on 27th August 1872, the Governor made the following appointments under the Ordinance: H F Plow, Esq to be Registering Officer; Dr A F Anderson to be Visiting Surgeon; Mr Charles Phillips (an ex-Army sergeant) to be Inspector.<sup>48</sup>

The Governor reported to the Secretary of State on 30th September 1872<sup>49</sup> that he had at length found himself able to bring the Ordinance into partial operation in

Singapore. He had been delayed in effecting this by the strong feeling of opposition among a large section of the community, viz. the Chinese. The larger portion of the brothels were occupied and frequented by the Chinese and they were invariably connected with the Secret Societies which formed an important element in the social system. The Ordinance gave the Government complete control over the brothels which would result in a diminution of the authority and revenue of the Societies, and a reduction of the brothel keepers' profits. Moreover, the inmates were alarmed by the idea of being visited and inspected by European officers.

*"Under these circumstances, it was clear that until the apprehensions of the Chinese were allayed, it would be dangerous to attempt the introduction of the measure, and that even then the greatest tact and judgement would be required on the part of the officers selected to carry it out. Having consulted the Hon. Mr Whampoa and the other principal Chinese gentlemen of the Settlement, I called together the leading persons connected with these establishments, . . . explained the objects to them and the mode to effect them. . . . Some concessions were made to the prejudices. . . . At length they agreed that the Ordinance should be brought into operation in their establishments and that they would give their assistance in carrying it out. . . ."*

He also mentioned that the Ordinance was proclaimed in the Chinese part of the Town on 2nd September 1872, and a fee of 50 cents had been levied on each inmate of every brothel. If things ran smoothly, the Ordinance would be extended to the European and other brothels, where no trouble was expected, on 15th October 1872. 166 Chinese brothels were registered in September, containing 1345 inmates in all. Fees collected amounted to \$672.50. "Not the slightest disturbance or difficulty has arisen nor a complaint which was not easily settled by Mr Plow with success . . ." (premature assessment, see below).

An Order of the Governor-in-Council passed on 10th October stated that the Ordinance was to come into operation in the remaining portion of the Town of Singapore on the 1st day of November 1872.<sup>50</sup>

On 29th October 1872, a riot broke out in Singapore. The riot was a demonstration against the police and was caused by an attempt to enforce the provisions of the Conservancy Act (Indian Act XIV of 1856: An Act for the Conservancy and Improvement of the towns of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, and the several stations of the Settlement of Prince of Wales Island, Singapore and Malacca). A crowd of samsengs (thugs) taking advantage of the confusion, showed their opposition to the Contagious Diseases Ordinance by attacking the Office of the Registering Officer and destroying the furniture and printed forms.<sup>51</sup> Others threatened Mr Tan Quee Lan, the landlord of the building in Campong Malacca used as the Registration Office, with death unless the turned the Government out of the building.<sup>52</sup> Luckily, law and order were soon restored with the help of the military.

The Contagious Diseases Ordinance came into operation in Penang on 20th December 1872, and in Malacca on 10th January 1873.<sup>53</sup>

(to be continued in Part II of this article).