

17TH SEPTEMBER, 1894.

PRESENT—

His Excellency the Governor, Sir WILLIAM ROBINSON,
K.C.M.G.

Hon. J. H. STEWART LOCKHART, Acting Colonial
Secretary.

Hon. A. J. LEACH, Q.C., Acting Attorney-General.

Hon. N. G. MITCHELL-INNES, Colonial Treasurer.

Hon. R. M. RUMSEY, R.N., Harbour Master.

Hon. E. BOWDLER.

Hon. C. P. CHATER.

Hon. J. J. KESKICK.

Hon. HO KAI.

Hon. E. R. BELLIOS, C.M.G.

Hon. A. McCONACHIE.

Mr. A. SETH, Clerk of Councils.

MINUTES.

The minutes of the previous meeting, after slight amendment, were read and confirmed.

THE REPORT OF THE RETRENCHMENT COMMITTEE.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY—I have the honour to lay on the table the report of the Committee appointed to enquire into the expenditure of the colony.

THE MILITARY CONTRIBUTION.

Hon. E. R. BELLIOS—Sir, is it a fact that a certain and not inconsiderable proportion of the amount voted by this Council as a contribution for the maintenance of the Garrison and which is paid in sterling at the rate of exchange of the day, is spent by the Military Authorities locally and in silver dollars, and if so will not the War

Office consent to receive such contribution at its average amount in dollars calculated at the rate of exchange prevailing at the date the contribution was increased to £40,000 sterling? With your Excellency's permission I beg to point out that owing to the fall in exchange the contribution presses with great severity on the Colony, and if a large proportion of the sum is expended locally in dollars the War Office are profiting greatly by our loss. This was never contemplated when the sum was fixed at £40,000, and if the concession suggested were made it would, to some extent, relieve the Colony without causing loss to the War Office, the prices of food, &c., having not appreciably advanced in Hongkong.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY—Though it is not possible to distinguish the various military disbursements as being made from any particular receipt, I am able to state that out of a total of £154,000 disbursed locally last year by the military about £68,000 were spent in payment fixed in dollars and not in sterling. As regards the second part of the question I may mention that the Governor has already made several representations to the Secretary of State respecting the necessity of reconsidering the military contribution on account of the fall in exchange, and in his despatches to the Secretary of State has supported the view held by the unofficial members and by the members of the Committee appointed to enquire into the Expenditure of the colony, viz., that the military contribution should be fixed in dollars and not, as at present, in sterling. It is not too much to expect an early reply to his Excellency's representations.

WITHDRAWAL OF MOTION.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY—I beg permission to withdraw the motion standing in my name. I trust to be in a position to bring it forward at the next meeting of Council.

HEALTH ORDINANCE 1894

The ACTING ATTORNEY GENERAL—I beg to move the first reading of a Bill to make provision for dealing with certain houses closed during the plague, and to make further and better provision for the health of the colony. In moving the first reading I do not intend to detain the Council at any great length. The Bill has been in the hands of hon. members for such a short time that I am quite sure they will better appreciate my remarks after further consideration of this measure, but I wish to make a short statement as to the real object of the Bill, and to remove misapprehensions as to its intended effect. The object of the Bill is to carry out certain recommendations of the Permanent Committee of the Sanitary Board and the Housing Committee—only such recommendations as are deemed to be necessary and expedient at present and not to touch upon other of their recommendations which would necessitate careful consideration of the Building and Health Ordinances, which must certainly occupy two or three

months. One misapprehension in particular I wish to avoid. I have heard it said "You are going to deal with a number of houses that have been closed by the Permanent Committee, under the authority conferred by their by-laws and by the special by-laws made during the prevalence of the plague and by the Ordinance passed to confirm what had been done, and yet you are making no provision whatever for the compensation of the persons who have lost money in rent by reason of the action of the Permanent Committee." It has been suggested that because this Ordinance does not provide for compensation of owners for rents lost, the Government intends to give no such compensation at all. I wish at once to remove that misapprehension. The question whether the Government shall provide compensation or not is under consideration, and if a scheme is hereafter formulated it would have to receive the sanction of the Secretary of State, either in the form of a draft scheme sent home and approved previously, or in the form of an ordinance, with a suspending clause. In either event it would mean very serious delay in carrying out the provision now contemplated, which are deemed essential and urgent by the Permanent Committee. I may also state that the schedules of this Ordinance are not yet quite complete; these schedules will show what houses have been and still are closed, what have been closed and reopened under the Permanent Committee's conditions; but I propose with your Excellency's sanction to obtain a list of those houses in an enlarged form showing not only what the schedules in this Ordinance will show but showing the names of the owners of the houses which have been closed, the time during which they have been closed, and, if it is possible to ascertain it, the amount of rent which those houses, if let, would have obtained for their owners during the period of their being closed. Upon that schedule or list a scheme could be formulated or an Ordinance drafted, and I do not think it would be a matter of great difficulty. With these few remarks I beg to move the first reading of the Bill, and I may say that all the time which the unofficial members think necessary for the consideration of the Bill will be given before the second reading.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY—I beg to second the first reading of the Bill.

Hon. J. J. KESWICK—Sir, this Bill, as the hon. Attorney-General has just mentioned, has been in the hands of the unofficial members such a short time that we shall need some delay before the second reading, as it has been quite impossible to master its contents. It is an exceedingly important measure, and a cursory glance at it I think will show that it is one which would be wholly unacceptable to the public, and its provisions in many respects would be wholly inapplicable to this community. It is my intention therefore, unless it is very materially altered before it

comes up again—and unless very ample time is given for its consideration which I am glad to note the hon. Attorney-General has promised —it is my intention to move at the second reading that the Bill be thrown out.

The Bill was then read a first time.

SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL 1893.

The COLONIAL TREASURER—I have the honour, sir, to move the second reading of the Bill entitled an Ordinance to authorise the Appropriation of a Supplementary sum of \$212,547.92 to defray the charges of the year 1893. I have endeavoured as my report shows to simplify the form of the supplementary estimates this year with a view to rendering them more intelligible to hon. members of Council. I have much satisfaction in stating that the net increase for the year, in spite of the drop in the gold value of the dollar, amounts to some \$2,000 only, while the expenditure on public works extraordinary has been brought up much nearer to the estimate than it has been in bygone years. As will be seen the net increase for which I have to ask a vote is only \$2,000, though the total sum which I am compelled to ask for amounts to \$212,547. I shall be happy in Committee to answer any questions which hon. members may wish to put to me regarding any of the items.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY seconded.

Bill read a second time.

The Bill passed through Committee without discussion.

The Council resumed.

The COLONIAL TREASURER moved the third reading of the Bill.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY seconded.

Bill read a third time and passed.

THE TAIPINGSHAN RESUMPTION ORDINANCE.

Council resumed the consideration of the schedules of this Bill in Committee.

The ACTING ATTORNEY-GENERAL then moved that the Bill be recommitted in order that a few small alterations might be made.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY seconded.

Bill in Committee.

The ACTING ATTORNEY-GENERAL suggested that the provision for inserting an advertisement of the list of lots, etc., in a London paper was unnecessary as he was given to understand that only two owners resided at home and they were represented here.

The deletion was agreed to.

Upon Section 8,

The ACTING ATTORNEY-GENERAL moved an alteration which provided that instead of four months (as originally provided) the words "as soon as possible and not more than six months after the publishing of the constitution of the Board of Arbitration" should rule the period for the sending in of claims for compensation and explained that this alteration would probably make the Board to get to work on the settlement of claims for compensation four month

searlier than under the original wording of the clause.

This was agreed to.

In Sections 13 and 14,

The ACTING ATTORNEY-GENERAL moved the insertion of the words "after hearing the parties" after the words "the Board" in each section.

Agreed.

Council then resumed.

The ACTING ATTORNEY-GENERAL—I beg to move the third reading of the Bill.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY—I beg to second it.

Bill read a third time and passed.

HON. C. P. CHATERS MOTION FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A COMMISSION.

Hon. C. P. CHATER—I beg to move the resolution standing in my name. Your Excellency, it is not necessary for me to speak at length in support of the motion which stands in my name to-day, for I have already given my reasons why I consider the appointment of such a Commission as I advocate to be a prudent measure, and I sincerely trust there is now no misunderstanding about them. Far be it from me even to appear to throw obstacles in the way of measures undertaken to avert the possibility of a recurrence of the plague which has so recently afflicted us but it is strongly borne in upon me that all that is necessary might be done without having recourse to such wholesale destruction as has been proposed. I say—let your Excellency appoint a Commission such as I ask for, of as representative a nature as possible, and then, if the Commission decide that the original plan of the destruction must be carried out, I and many who think with me will have the satisfaction of knowing that the question has had every possible consideration in all its aspects; but on the other hand, if the decision of the Commission coincides with our idea, a large sum of money will have been saved to our at present hard-pressed Colony. Therefore I beg to propose that a Commission be appointed to enquire into and report to the Government upon the question of what portion of the buildings situated on the land to be resumed under the provisions of the Taipingshan Resumption Bill should be destroyed, and what portion should not.

Hon. A. McCONACHIE—Your Excellency, I rise to second the resolution just proposed by my friend the senior unofficial member. He has made the object for which he asks for this Commission so abundantly clear that it is unnecessary for me to add much. I can quite understand all who have not personally examined this property for themselves, and having read the evidence presented to the Government for the total destruction of Taipingshan, coming to that conclusion that that is necessary. I was of that number myself. However, I considered it my duty to examine the property in company with others very carefully, and I may say that the impression was forced upon my mind that there was a great deal of excellent property,

excellent streets of concrete, well laid down channels, and excellent granite steps, and much other valuable property which it seemed to me it was not entirely necessary to destroy. I do not advocate for a moment half measures. Considering the disastrous effect of the plague on the trade of the colony no one, I think, would advocate that; but I am not at all satisfied that all the evidence that is in the possession of the Government has been given by those who first for themselves personally inspected the property, and I am afraid a great deal of it is, as it were, hearsay evidence. I feel sure that if all would go and see the property for themselves they would join in the conclusion arrived at by those with whom I was associated in the inspection. I think the greater number of them came to the conclusion that it was a pity to destroy so much valuable property. Therefore I think if this Commission were granted and they examined the property personally it would give satisfaction to all. If after examining it as a whole they came to the decision that to be absolutely safe it is desirable to destroy it all, then I say I should approve of their action. Only do not destroy that which it is entirely unnecessary to destroy.

His EXCELLENCY—Gentlemen, I feel bound, in what I consider the best interests of the Colony, to oppose the motion of the hon. member. I am very sorry that I should be obliged to take this step because the hon. member has, on many occasions, given to me personally and to the Government most excellent advice and assistance, but I venture to think, on this occasion, his assistance is not worth our acceptance and his advice is not sound. I shall be very sorry if this motion is passed. I trust the hon. member will not be able to command a majority of votes, because if the motion is passed it will, I think, simply mean further concessions to the weak-kneed, and we have certainly made sufficient concessions already in the Taipingshan Resumption Ordinance. The passage of this motion will mean a lot of further fruitless discussion and more litigation, and I have no doubt it will result in dangerous and unnecessary delays. Gentlemen, I do not think we need go very far to find out the source from which the hon. member has gained his inspiration. You know in these degenerate days as they are called the pen is very often mightier than the sword, and we all know that some weeks ago a highly respected member of the community—a gentleman resident at the Peak—wielded his pen with very great effect. There is no truer saying, I think, and I am sure it is a saying which will recommend itself to the gentleman in question, if it is a Scriptural one, than that "Familiarity breeds contempt." That is exactly the case in this instance. We have seen the plague come amongst us, we have seen it increase in virulence and carry off its hundred victims per day, and we have seen it gradually abate, and, thank God, we have seen it disappear; and we, now, only look upon it as an evil of the past. While this steady decrease has been

going on the pen of the ready writer I have referred to has been wielded with considerable effect. He told us—as has been inferred by the hon. member representing the Chamber of Commerce—he told us in polished periods that after a few little structural alterations Taipingshan, the seat of the plague, might easily be made an oasis in the desert—an earthly paradise. He has also sought to persuade those who will no doubt feel financial loss under the Resumption Ordinance that if the streets and alleys of Taipingshan, which have been described by the medical eye-witnesses as pestiferous, "foul, poisonous, and a mass of pollution"—he has tried to persuade these people that by the application of a little extra whitewash and water the houses and streets might be made to "rejoice like the desert and flourish like the rose." Gentlemen, I ask—is it possible that we, a body of sane men, can receive statements of this sort in the face of overwhelming evidence we have received from experts and scientists in the matter? I say certainly not. I may further say that, supposing any additional evidence is wanted, such as the senior unofficial member and the member representing the Chamber of Commerce desire, surely we have in the Government service our Colonial Surgeon, with 25 or 30 years' experience in the Colony, and our Director of Public Works—both able and responsible men—who are fully capable of giving us as good advice as anyone can on the subject. I think the acceptance of the hon. member's motion would be running a great risk, which I personally dare not incur. The trade of the Colony has suffered sufficiently in the last six months. and if we had unhappily a recurrence of the plague I am afraid our trade would not temporarily but permanently suffer. Then, too, I do not think the hon. member fully realises the awkward position in which I should be placed if I accepted his motion. I do not think I could—I do not feel prepared to try to—select a body of gentlemen with greater experience, greater knowledge of the Colony, greater ability, and whose opinions would carry greater weight than the gentlemen composing the Permanent Committee and the Housing Committee; and am I, as Governor, after having accepted their advice and thanking them for it two months ago, to turn round now and say, "Gentlemen, although I accepted your advice two months ago I have repented and I must get an abler body of men, in whom I have more confidence, to reconsider your opinions and give me better advice?" I am not prepared, gentlemen, to occupy a position of that sort; I am not prepared to put a question of that sort to the gentlemen who have acted so thoroughly in this matter. If I did, I should lay myself open to the charges of inconsistency and vacillation which would very properly be hurled against me. Might I call your attention to the programme which the

Government deliberately sketched out on the 20th June. After sending to the Secretary of State the extract from my speech delivered at this table on the 12th June, I said, "The remedy is, as your Lordship will see, a very drastic one. It may result in the destruction and re-building of one-tenth part of Hongkong. It will certainly necessitate the extension in every direction of houses fitted for Chinese occupation on improved sanitary principles. It will doubtless cause a general increase in rents, an increase in the cost of living, as well as a general increase in the rate of wages. It will also necessitate the increase of the storage capacity of the Tytam Water Works so as to secure an additional supply of about 80,000,000 gallons of water." Then I went on to say, in paragraph 34,— "In reply to my speech I may here mention that on behalf of the unofficial members and the community at large, the senior unofficial member, the Hon. C. P. Chater, promised that the Government should be loyally supported in all its endeavours to cope with the unfortunate dilemma in which the colony is placed." This despatch I read to the hon. senior unofficial member before it was sent to the Secretary of State—I am not sure whether I read it to Mr. Keswick also—

Hon. J. J. KESWICK—You did not read it to me, Sir.

His EXCELLENCY—At all events, the senior unofficial member made the contents of the despatch known to all the other unofficial members of the Government. But really, gentlemen, I may be making too much of this, for I do not see how the hon. member proposes to get his majority, unless many of the members at this table are going to stultify themselves and eat their own words; for my friend the hon. member for the Colonial Secretariat, who also is Registrar General and Protector of Chinese, recommended me on several occasions to accept the advice of the Permanent Committee and the Housing Committee; the Colonial Treasurer and Dr. Ho Kai, one as chairman and the other as a member of the Housing Committee, signed the unanimous report strongly recommending the total destruction of Taipingshan "preferably by fire;" the Director of Public Works had a representative on that Committee, and he is not likely to contradict his advice; Mr. Belilios at our last unofficial meeting told us he was in favour of destruction by fire, and gave us a thrilling account of some Indian city or village which was destroyed by fire, and in which no case of cholera had ever occurred since—

Hon. E. R. BELILIOS—No, it was Naples I referred to.

His EXCELLENCY—I do not know what the hon. member the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce has to say. He has just returned from the seat of war, and should know all about the danger of delay. As to the hon. the Attorney-General, I think I can guess what his opinion is. I have no

desire to make this a Government question, I think it is one of the most important which has ever come before this Council, and I feel sure my colleagues of the Government if they have strong opinions will stick to them. I am sure they realize the weight of responsibility which is involved in their vote. You may say that a Commission of this sort will not do harm and that it may do good and that money may be saved. That, I say, is an invertebrate reason, and matter of pure speculation. I think such a Commission as proposed is unnecessary, as it is liable to increase the delays which are sure to arise over this very big question. If the hon. member is fortunate enough to carry his motion, he has my best wishes for its success, and I hope it will turn out better than he expects, and result in saving a large sum of money. I do not want to spend more than is necessary. But I think, in recording my vote against it, I shall at least have acted logically and consistently, and in accordance with the weight of evidence placed before me.

The ACTING ATTORNEY-GENERAL—Sir, I feel that it is my duty also to oppose this motion. Much of what your Excellency has already said has cut away what I intended to say to the Council, but I now oppose this motion mainly on the ground that the appointment of a Commission is unnecessary. In the first place the decision of the Government—although it is pretty certain what the decision of the Government is—is not final. That decision, such as it is, has been arrived at from two reports, one of the Permanent Committee of the Sanitary Board and one of the Housing Committee, both of which bodies have absolutely reported in favour of demolition. One report is based on the experience of those who devoted such an enormous amount of time to the plague and plague questions during the last four or five months, and the other is based chiefly on the medical evidence, all of which, as I have pointed out before in this Chamber, is unanimously in favour of the demolition of these houses and their destruction by fire. So far as the Government is concerned none of those gentlemen who have reported on the destruction of the houses, or who have given evidence in favour of that, have altered their opinions. I cannot conceive that they could have altered their opinions. I have heard it said that they have, but I cannot conceive that they should have so changed without having informed the Government that their views had altered. I cannot imagine that they would leave the Government in such a false position by leading the Government to believe that their views were still the same as those on which the Government based its opinion, when they were not. Well, if it is thought, whenever the Government has to come to a final conclusion on the matter, or when it is really and finally to be determined what is to be done with this area,

that the medical evidence can be supplemented in any way, surely it is equally as open to the Government as to any Commission, and probably such further evidence would be taken in a much shorter and less expensive way. The evidence of the medical profession as it stands shows that the whole of the soil in this area is impregnated, possibly with plague germs—certainly it is infected and in a more or less insanitary condition—and that the total destruction of all the houses in it is most necessary. Therefore you must either cleanse that soil or remove it. Then as regards the necessity for pulling down good houses or the possibility of leaving some houses standing while destroying others, that again is a question of expert evidence—I do not mean the evidence of amateur experts who go round and look at the houses but who possess no really practical knowledge, but I mean the evidence of architects and engineers, which is really valuable. I do not wish for a moment to throw any blame or cast any slur on those gentlemen who have gone through this area and tried to see for themselves what the condition of those buildings is, but I venture to say that their sight from want of experience may have misled them. I think if we want further evidence, if the Government desires further evidence, surely they have it within their hands' reach, and unless the hon. senior unofficial member's motion means that the Public Works Department is not able, or capable, of doing that which he wishes this Commission to do, surely the evidence that can be obtained as to the condition of these houses—and as to whether a certain house should be pulled down and another left standing—is in the possession of the Government or is equally as available to the Government now as to a Commission hereafter. I think it is also to be borne in mind that if a Commission was appointed such as is proposed by the hon. senior unofficial member, it would really to a certain extent be doing double work, work which was also being carried out under the Ordinance which has just been read in this Council a third time. I dare say the hon. member will at once guess what I mean. In that Ordinance the arbitrators have to appoint certain persons—no doubt experts; architects on the one hand and medical men on the other—to examine and enquire into the condition of these houses. I do not say that it would go to the whole extent to which the Commission would carry their labours, but it would certainly perform a very great part of the same work as the Commission would be performing. Therefore the survey and detailing of the condition of these houses will be of great assistance to the Government in coming to a determination, when the survey is completed, as to what is ultimately to be done with this area. A Commission, then, going to work at the same time as this survey is in progress would practically mean two bodies of people to carry out the same object. Now, Sir, of course there is the argument which your Excellency has touched upon. People may say

"This Commission can do no harm, and it may do some good." I don't know. As your Excellency has said, that seems rather an invertebrate policy. I am afraid that the appointment of a Commission would cause serious delay. It must take a great amount of time. To be thorough the commissioners must go over the whole of the medical evidence, and take the expert evidence of every architect and engineer of standing in the colony, and how long do you think that would take? I apprehend that it would take six months at least. If the mere survey of these houses, and examination, is to take four months or at the outside six months, I think it is fair to say that a Commission to do its work thoroughly will take at least that time if not longer, and that if they wanted expert evidence the Commission would have to pay for it. I believe on one occasion, during the Fever Commission, a good deal of expert evidence was taken from the doctors—who are regarded as experts—and probably they made no charge for it. But business men, architects and engineers—I doubt whether they would be able or willing to give their time and attention to this without being paid. I do not think it would do very much good because I think all the evidence that can be gained is within the grasp of the Government at the present time, and therefore, Sir, I beg to oppose this motion.

The COLONIAL TREASURER—Sir I should like to say a few words upon this motion. Your Excellency and the learned Attorney-General have dealt with this question so very fully that there remains very little to say. The key note of the proposal seems to be that given by my hon. friend on my right (Hon. A. McConachie)—"It is a pity to destroy valuable property," and, Sir, I have myself thought since the commencement of the plague, and more every day, that that would come into greater prominence by delay. The dangers of the plague will gradually disappear, will be lost to sight and memory, and the pity of destroying valuable property will occupy a hold on the colony. It appeals to my hon. friend on my right (Hon. A. McConachie). He has given it as a reason why this Commission should be appointed. Another of his reasons is that he has personally made an inspection of the property, whereas he has reason to believe that the advisers of the Government have gone on hearsay.

Hon. A. McCONACHIE—Not entirely.

The COLONIAL TREASURER—No, but to a great extent. I should only like to remark that the Housing Committee consisted of members who have been acquainted with Taipingshan for many years, of architects who know the property and have had to deal with it for a long time, and of others, among whom was my friend on my left (Hon. Ho Kai) who is a s c a p a b l e o f

giving an opinion on the subject as most people, who, though not qualified to speak as experts, have been in and out of the houses when the plague was on, and not after the woodwork had been torn down, the houses been cleaned out and whitewashed, and the place transformed into what Mr. Granville Sharp might call a Garden of the Hesperides, and of which he might say "Why destroy these beautiful houses which have as much light as the Crystal Palace?" I should say that if they want to know what a house is like they should see it inhabited, when the windows are blocked up, and the place is full of dust and dirt and refuse. When the Commission is appointed we cannot have on it the Colonial Surgeon, nor the Military medical adviser, nor the Naval medical adviser, nor Dr. James, nor Mr. Turner, nor Mr. Leigh; we can simply have on it those, Sir, who have an opinion contrary to the persons composing the two committees, the Housing Committee and the Permanent Committee. I must say the Committee which I have the honour to preside over—the Housing Committee—approached the subject of the demolition of Taipingshan with the greatest reluctance and not at all with the eagerness which the remarks of my friend on the right (Hon. A. McConachie) would seem to imply. One of the senior members of the Committee prefaced his remarks at one of its meetings by saying that we must certainly not recommend the destruction of Taipingshan unless it was found to be absolutely necessary. After hearing all the evidence of the architects, and doctors, and members of the Committee generally, he was one of the first to say that there was no help for it but the destruction of Taipingshan. At the same time I am quite willing to grant that the Bill as it stands does not compel the Government to destroy Taipingshan either in whole or in part, and if between now and the time when the decision has to be given it should appear from any evidence which may hereafter be given to the Government, that there is no necessity for destroying Taipingshan I am sure the Council may rest assured that the Government will not rush blindly into destruction. I very much doubt, I must say, whether such evidence can be given. I do not think that I have anything further to add except that I would strongly urge the members of this Council to recollect the very critical state of the colony only a very short time ago, and the fact that at that time there was no voice upraised nor pen put to paper to advise half measures or dilatoriness in dealing with that part of the city which had supplied 50 per cent. of the victims to the plague.

The HARBOUR MASTER—I am glad, sir, that your Excellency has allowed this question not to be a Government one because I am enabled to express my concurrence with the principle brought forward by the hon. mover of the motion that the Government should get sound advice before acting on the Taipingshan Resumption Ordinance. I wish that the hon. member had gone further I

should like to see that principle extended so that we should get not only sound advice but the very best advice it is possible for us to get. I do not think any local commission, any commission which can be found locally, will be of the slightest use; we have had opinions galore given here. But I think I am right in saying that sanitary science is a speciality of two professions, the medical and engineering, and I do not wish it to be understood, very far from it, that I desire to imply anything derogatory to the local ability of this colony when I say that I do not think it does possess the best opinion the colony could have. The learned Attorney-General, at the first reading, said that the Government was in possession of the best evidence at its disposal. That may be, I dare say it is, and in fact I am sure it must be, but what we want is not any more evidence on it but the verdict of capable men on that evidence. The same men gave the evidence and also the verdict. It was not evidence really but opinion, and the opinion they expressed was that this area should be burnt down. But I venture to doubt in my own mind whether all these gentlemen or any of them were as capable of forming an opinion as men who can be got specially for the purpose. The total demolition of Taipingshan would in all human probability prevent a recurrence of the plague, but it seems to me that it might have the appearance, if the Council will excuse the simile, of cutting of a man's arm above the elbow because he had a dislocated finger. It is a very effective plan, but is there not a plan equally good which is less drastic and less expensive? Therefore I think it would be worth the colony's while if we could get experts, really sanitary experts, from India or elsewhere, as may be thought best, who would listen to the evidence given by the people who have made a point of saying here what they have to say, and then give the Government the best advice which could be given. These men, I would suggest, if I may be allowed to, should be placed in the position of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee of "fit and proper persons" or of the Commission which has been proposed by the hon. member. If the motion proposed by the hon. member is pressed I am afraid it is not of much use. For the reasons I have stated I would not be able to vote with him for a local commission because I think it would be simply time and money wasted. But if we can get a really expert commission to come and give their opinion it would be well worth the expenditure of money which would be necessary.

Hon. HO KAI—I am always unwilling to speak or vote against my unofficial colleagues, but in the present case I feel it my bounden duty to do so. I shall be very short inasmuch as I have said I am very unwilling to do so. Sir, the subject matter of discussion is the destruction

of Taipingshan. Now of course the locality is well known to a great number of people, perhaps more to the Chinese than to the Europeans. I have been there thousands of times myself, and all the localities round Taipingshan I am familiar with. So when I was on the Sanitary Board and the Housing Committee and heard the expert evidence on Taipingshan, I was hearing evidence given on a locality that I have personal experience of, and with the condition of which I have been well acquainted for the last 15 years. And after hearing all that evidence and notwithstanding the opinion of others that they were not capable sanitary engineers or that our opinion is not of the best kind, still, exercising my best judgment I assisted the others in arriving at the conclusion that the whole of Taipingshan should come down and be destroyed. There is no doubt that a few houses might stand, but considering that the majority of the houses are of a very bad and insanitary character we came to the conclusion that the few good ones must be sacrificed. Since that opinion was formed after a great deal of consideration and deliberation I can assure your Excellency that I think that every member of the Housing Committee and also every member of the Permanent Committee of the Sanitary Board, is prepared to stand on that same opinion this very day and this very hour. There were remarks that some of them had changed their opinions. But I may say as to that that I am not one of them. I have seen many of them day after day and certainly I have never heard that. In advocating this measure we are constantly charged with advising the Government to a very expensive action, and we are often taunted with the question. "Can you make it sure that by this enormous sacrifice of money and trouble we are to be safe from the plague next season?" Now, to that I would simply say that it is to the best of our knowledge and belief that by improving Taipingshan in the way suggested, and by improving other isolated localities in the same manner, I say by so doing we firmly believe the plague will be got rid of. We are mortal men. That is all we can say; we cannot say any more. We cannot be certain of anything, but what we can be certain of is that to the best of our power and ability, and on the best evidence we could get, we are of opinion that this is the surest way of getting rid of it. Of course we are prepared to take that responsibility. I admire those men who would dare to come out and do their best for the public even at the risk of being charged afterwards with having given bad or wrong opinions. There are always some who try to shelter themselves behind something and say "Oh, I think it is perfectly safe without." There is the responsibility which as public men each of us should take, and if we do our work with clear consciences even if we fail our error will be excused. As I have said before, I have given this subject my thorough consideration and my whole attention and my opinion remains as

confirmed now as it was before. I feel there is no chance for me to-day to escape doing a disagreeable thing—that is to vote against the senior unofficial member and the member who represents the Chamber of Commerce.

Hon. E. R. BELLIOS—Your Excellency, although I have pronounced in favour of the resumption and destruction of the closed houses in Taipingshan, I do not hesitate to support the proposal of my honourable friend opposite for the appointment of a commission to inquire into the condition of the condemned property. I am in favour of destruction rather than of repair or patching up, not because in my opinion the latter course would not prove sufficient for the purpose but because the former mode of dealing with the district would, I believe, act somewhat as a sacrifice to the gods did in ancient times— it would serve to restore confidence in our sanitary condition, not so much perhaps in our own minds but in those of some of our timid neighbours. This is a matter of the highest importance, for while our ships are quarantined at other ports and this port is avoided as infected, the loss caused to our trade is immense. The expenditure involved in destroying and rebuilding two or three hundred houses, serious as it would prove, would be small compared with the loss which another six months' quarantining would entail. I am in favour of destruction as practised in Naples, when it was found that cholera had become endemic in that city. In 1886-1887 it was decided by the Neapolitan Authorities to raze a large section of the slums and rebuild it. The district was ten times the size of the Taipingshan closed area. They pulled down and rebuilt all the houses, except those having historical value, which were made sanitary and suffered to remain. Since that improvement has been effected cholera has ceased to be an annual scourge to Naples. Now I see no reason why in Taipingshan, where there are no buildings possessing any historical interest, the new tenements should not be allowed to take their place and remain standing. So far, I believe the weight of evidence before the Government is in favour of destruction by fire, but there is a strong feeling in the Colony that the employment of this agent, or total destruction of the houses by any other means, would be a mistake. Personally I am opposed to the employment of fire as it would entail great expense in the removal of the *debris* and would ruin the streets and side channels, which are almost new. The appointment of the commission could do no harm and it need not even cause delay. In the multitude of counsellors, we are told on the best authority, there is wisdom; and another report on the closed area in Taipingshan, from practical men, would be sure to add somewhat to our knowledge of the local conditions. No time need be lost, inas-

much as the Board of Arbitrators will have to fix the value of the resumed property, and the Commission should be ready with their report about the same date. Let us not act too hurriedly. There is now no cause for panic, no excuse for rash and ill-considered legislation. If opinions conflict so seriously that it seems difficult to decide which course to take, then I would suggest that the closed area might remain undisturbed for a season, until we have more and better evidence to guide us. But whatever we do, let it not be the result of alarm or prejudice or obstinacy, for this is a matter that should be calmly and dispassionately reasoned out, so that no useless waste of public money need take place, nor on the other hand any foolish shrinking from a necessary expenditure, which would be fatally false economy.

The ACTING COLONIAL SECRETARY—I had not intended to take any part, Sir, in this discussion, but seeing the lines on which the arguments for and against this resolution have run, I think it only right that I should state the reasons why I intend to vote against the motion, as those reasons are not the same as have been urged by most of the hon. members who have spoken against the resolution. My chief reason for voting against it is that its object is practically obtained by section 7 of the Ordinance which reads:—"Until the completion

of the survey and examination or of the further enquiry, if any, mentioned in section 6 of this Ordinance, no houses upon the lands resumed under this Ordinance, shall be altered, pulled down or destroyed. Upon the completion of such survey and examination or inquiry the houses and lands resumed may be dealt with in such manner as the Governor may direct." Under those circumstances I do not see what useful purpose the motion could serve seeing that if this survey and enquiry mentioned in the section tend to show that the total destruction of the district is not necessary every one may be assured that the area would not be destroyed. Your Excellency referred to the fact that I have on many occasions advised you to adopt the recommendations of the Permanent Committee. That is so, but there have been occasions when I have advised that their recommendations should not be followed. On this question of destruction, however, I have never advised your Excellency either one way or the other. I do not say that it is the best thing, but at the same time I do not say that it is not the best thing. I consider this question is one which should be allowed to remain open, and this, as I have pointed out, is secured by the Ordinance.

The vote on the motion was then taken.

FOR.	AGAINST.
Hon. C. P. Chater	His Excellency
Hon. E. R. Belilios	The Acting Attorney-General
Hon. J. J. Keswick	The Colonial Treasurer
Hon. A. McConachie	The Act. Colonial Secretary
The Harbour Master	Hon. E. Bowdler
	Hon. Ho Kai

The motion was then declared lost.

ADJOURNMENT.

His EXCELLENCY—The Council stands adjourned until this day three weeks.