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SECRET SOCIETIES IN CHINA.

The *Overland China Mail* gives from the report of the Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Penang riots of 1867, and a work by Mr. Gustave Schlegel, a Chinese interpreter in the service of the Dutch Government, an interesting account of the working of secret societies in the Celestial empire. It appears that toward the close of the seventeenth century a conspiracy against the newly formed Manchow sovereignty of China was set on foot by some Buddhist monks, and that the secret societies which have since flourished in China or the Straits possessions have found it convenient to assert a direct affiliation with this original brotherhood. Few political plots in China are wholly free, indeed, from the participation of members of the Buddhist clergy, whose idle lives and mastery of superstitious formulas render them extremely prone to engage in illegal enterprises of this description. Poor and unemployed scholars—the pest of the Chinese body politic—form another important constituent of seditious brotherhoods; and between the two, an unlimited supply of mystic symbolism and of pedantic verbiage becomes available for concealing the real objects of such associations under a fantastic and alluring garb. Thus it is found that the oaths, passwords, catechisms, and manifestoes of the secret societies existing at the present day in the Straits settlements uniformly allege, as their pervading design, a combination for the purpose of overthrowing the present dynasty in China and restoring the glorious house of Ming. Scores upon scores of pages of tedious verbiage, such as only the dull pedantry of a Chinese would have the patience to invent, may be seen in Mr. Schlegel's work, in which the changes are constantly rung on this one idea; yet nothing is further from the minds of the actually initiated than any political commotion in their native land. To them it matters little who sits on the Chinese throne; nine-tenths of them, in all probability, repeat these wearisome formulas with no inkling of their meaning; but in a political conspiracy one watchword is as good as another, and "Heaven protect the Ming" is accordingly perpetuated among a body of men whose principal aim it is to evade the action of British or Dutch courts of justice.

The Penang Commissioners found no less than four secret societies to be flourishing in that island, two of which were composed of Chinese and two of Malay and Kling (natives of India) members. Each of the latter associations appears to have allied itself with one of the Chinese societies, and the consequence was that, when a quarrel which had long been brewing between members of two of the rival leagues burst out in July, 1867, the entire native population of the island became speedily involved in an internecine warfare. The minute inquiry instituted by the Commissioners at sittings which lasted throughout a period

of nearly twelve months elicited the mass of valuable information comprised in the published evidence, and particularly in the voluminous documents forming the appendix to their report lately published. In these last-named papers particulars relating to the constitution of the secret leagues are given which correspond in every material point with Mr. Schlegel's revelations; and by their assistance we are enabled to lift the mask from these seditious leagues, and to discover beneath their flowery professions of patriotism the vulgar machinery of rapine, smuggling, and murder. Among the "instructions for members" translated in the appendix to the Penang report, we find that Rule X. lays down as a law of brotherhood that "If the members of our society commit any crime they will be provided with the means to make their escape, and they must not be allowed to be captured and punished. If when trying to make their escape they apply to some of the elders for aid, and such elders neglect to afford them such aid, and they be captured in consequence of such neglect, then the guilt of such delinquent elders will be unpardonable." Again, Rule VIII. provides that, "If outsiders commit any wrong to the members of our society, the Congsee will inquire into it, and if the fact be proved then we will go forward and fight them with all our might, so that others will not laugh us to scorn." In Mr. Schlegel's translation, the regulations he found in force in Java are given in seventy-two articles, being three times more numerous than those of the Penang Society, but the groundwork in both cases is the same. Both proclaim combination for mutual defence and defiance to the rest of the world as the real object of the society; and it is amusing to note that, notwithstanding the monstrous array of rubbish about the glorious Ming dynasty which appears in the ceremonial of the society, its framers have not condescended to incorporate even a pretence at political objects in the business-like regulations they have drawn up.

The *China Mail* adds that the disclosures made in this report are not destitute of interest for Australian Governments. From Brisbane to Adelaide there are Chinese gathered in townships, and scattered in the country, in commercial cities and in mining districts, among whom the traditions and ceremonies of brotherhood are preserved. It will be no disadvantage to the Australian police if they learn the secret signs and watchwords described in the report of the Penang Commissioners. The same remark will apply to California, where the Chinese are probably more numerous than in the southern colonies of Great Britain.

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