

No. 32.

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.

The following Annual Report from the Registrar General's Department for the Year 1868, is published for general information.

By Command,

J. GARDINER AUSTIN,
Colonial Secretary.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 18th March, 1869.

REGISTRAR GENERAL'S OFFICE,
HONGKONG, 24th February, 1869.

SIR,—In forwarding the Annual Blue Book Returns of this Department for the Year 1868, I have the honour to add to them a Report on such portions of public business as are more especially its concern.

2. There are no Census Returns this year. Mr. CECIL C. SMITH in his Report for 1867 having shewn that the English New Year is a time when numbers of Chinese have already left the Colony, in preparation for their own New Year, His Excellency the Governor has been pleased to postpone the Census till June.

3. The Registration Ordinance continues to work well so far as houses are concerned. By an Order of His Excellency the Governor, the fee for re-registration of houses in the case of large transfers of property has been reduced to one-third its former amount. This was an amendment much needed, as where a considerable number of houses were transferred, the fees pressed heavily on the holders of property.

4. The Registration of Servants cannot be spoken of so favourably. House Registration has attained its really great success, because a house is that for which somebody will always be found ready to accept a responsibility, and also because it is an approximation to the Chinese method of making *somebody* responsible for every offence. But where men only are concerned, who can run away when they please, no amount of registering, indexing, and classifying will affect their conduct.

5. The blame of the present unsatisfactory state of things should not rest on the community. My own limited observation of people here has found them singularly willing, and even anxious, to observe Registration requirements.

6. There are indeed one or two points on which the community might aid the law more effectively, the first is the most important, but is almost to be despaired of where Compradores are kept.

(a). By making every Servant *pay for his own ticket*.

(b). By discrediting stories about lost tickets, and preferring old to new ones.

(c). By returning the ticket to this Office, and not to the Servant himself, on his discharge.

7. Whilst a surveillance of Servants is continued at this Office, it is very desirable that some degree of Magisterial power be also given with it, especially for the daily increasing and annoying offence of "leaving without notice." A power to hear and determine questions between Master and Servant at the Registration Office, would, in some cases, prevent the defeat of justice, by the objection to appear in a public Court.

8. One error must be corrected, which might almost be called a "popular delusion," namely, that written statements of character, etc.; sent with Servant's tickets are not preserved at this Office and submitted to intending employers. The few obtained are always sent under cover and by proper messengers to any person about to engage the Servant referred to.

9. But all these precautions will never make the present law work well. The great number of Servants, the impossibility of identification, and the utter lack of hold upon them prevent it. The cases in which it has been possible to protect employers against dishonest employes during the past year have not perhaps in all amounted to a dozen.

10. Probably the only way really to regulate Servants would be to induce respectable Chinese to establish Licensed Registration Houses under ample security to Government, allowing them to furnish Certificates of Security up to \$100, \$200, or other suitable sums, such Certificates being *visés* at this Office. Then to leave it voluntary for employers to engage secured or non-secured Servants as they might choose. Of course such security would involve wages slightly higher than the average sums paid at present, but perfect safety, like other luxuries, must be paid for.

11. The past year has been a gloomy one amongst the Chinese, and there are few signs of a breaking of the clouds as yet. Many circumstances have conspired to aggravate the depression of trade which seems, in Chinese circles, to grow daily worse rather than better. Amongst others may be mentioned the *cordon* which has been drawn round this Island by the Chinese Government. If the collection of imposts were in the hands of Officers of unquestionable integrity it would be bad enough, but where the inevitable Chinese extortion is added, the hindrance to trade becomes almost intolerable.

12. Certain branches of commerce have not yet recovered from the panic into which they were thrown, by an attempt in October and November last, on the part of the Canton Customs, to stop the whole trade in foreign goods by Chinese bottoms to any other place than Canton. Full accounts of this will be found in the Chinese Newspapers published here.

13. Some few trades however have prospered in spite of the prevailing depression. Greater caution has been exercised than in previous years, credit has been less freely granted, and a watch has been maintained against the accumulation of bad debts. The Vermilion trade has been even flourishing.

14. General traders (Nám Pák Hong) dealers in Piece Goods, Cotton, and Opium, have, with a few exceptions, done well. The value of the Cotton sent to Canton alone, exclusive of Yarn, is stated at nearly Six millions of Dollars. Yarn has fallen off during the year, but not so much as in 1867, since when the Piece Goods trade would seem to have steadily increased. The Opium-farmers report a fairly satisfactory trade, still, if their figures may be trusted, the total of exports and consumption here, was \$100,000 less than in 1867.

15. The trade in Rice, though dull and apparently steadily decreasing, has been free from the disastrous losses of 1867 chiefly through caution on the part of the buyers induced by bitter experience.

16. Of the large trades, Pawnbroking has been the worst, the losses in this generally prosperous business are put at \$40,000. This has arisen, not because goods were not pawned, but because no remunerative sale was obtained from an immense number of unredeemed pledges. Gold shops have not done well, and perhaps their losses may be put at \$30,000.

17. Mr. SMITH reported the falling off of the Salt-fish trade from \$700,000 in 1866 to \$600,000 in 1867. It must be again reported as having fallen to \$500,000 in 1868. Two of the Làns closed. The Pig trade has also been dull, and the tenders for the Slaughter Houses were lower than those of 1867. One Pig-Làn was closed through losses in business, leaving only eight in place of thirteen in former years.

18. Small Shopkeepers have perhaps suffered most, especially the chandlers. The number of Spirit Licenses which have been resigned alone shews that times are not good with them, and though the Markets continue full, the tenants complain much of the difficulty of making a living.

19. Rents have fallen everywhere. It is only fair to say that they were unreasonably high before, and there are some who think they are too high still. Those of larger Hong are lowered from 15 to 25 per cent, and Chinese Landlords are said to have lost more than \$100,000.

20. A Report has already been sent in on the working of Ordinance 10 of 1867. In connection with that subject I may notice that very erroneous impression must have been given to many persons here, of a part of the Town quite unknown to them, by a passage in the late charge of the Bishop of the Diocese. His Lordship has seen fit to isolate one sentence out of an

Official Letter which gives a semblance of support to his views. The facts are patent, but what *are* the facts? That certain unseemly sights may be seen here occasionally, which may not be seen in Chinese Towns, proves nothing. Drunkenness is not seen in Chinese Towns.

21. His Lordship is pleased to assume that nothing has been done to lessen the evil. Everything has been done short of a foolish interference with the liberties which would be equally conserved elsewhere. If persons choose to go through the very lowest quarter of a Seaport Town, they must expect to see coarse sights, but that they can go through every street of that lowest quarter without annoyance, risk, or insult, is saying a good deal for any large town.

22. A full Report on the Fire Brigade cannot be looked for from this Office. It may be said nevertheless, that the Chinese Contingent of it is working steadily and well, and that there is every disposition to carry out the wishes of the Executive. It is only justice to the Chinese to add, that the long delay, which took place in forming the Brigade, is more to be attributed to my utter ignorance of how to set about the task, than to any double dealing on their part. The District Watchmen have been found of great use in the work of the Brigade.

23. An examination of the number of cases in which the District Watchmen have brought Offenders to Justice, shews that they have been concerned in 93 such cases, including 123 Defendants, of whom only Nine were discharged. The class of Persons punished through their endeavours may be broadly described as "Thieves," inasmuch as at least three fourths of the cases consist of "Larceny," "Robbery," or "Unlawful Possession." Some few, however, were simply charged with being bad or suspicious characters, and there are also one or two notorious kidnappers who are, happily, in Gaol.

24. The Records however from which these facts are taken, and which only extend over Ten months of the year, (Mr. SMITH having previously reported on January and February) do not adequately represent the service the Watchmen have rendered the Colony. Many cases which must otherwise have gone before the Magistrate, or even before the Supreme Court, have been quietly settled by them to the satisfaction of all parties. The Head Watchmen from their age and authority are often accepted as arbiters of perplexing disputes. Very valuable information has also been collected through them.

25. It is true that a Chinese Police Force will never carry out some of the views of the European Community, but then it is not paid by the European Community. The chief object of the Chinese in paying these Watchmen is to drive away thieves, the cardinal evil of a Shop-keeping population. And it is thought that the Watchmen succeed, not only in arresting actual Offenders, but also in keeping away those who live by pilfering.

26. The Report which appeared, some weeks ago, in a public print, as to a panic amongst the Chinese in regard to the voluntary tax collected amongst themselves for the support of the force, was wholly without foundation. No such panic existed, and if ever it does, it will take the form of a simple discontinuance of the subscription.

27. Much attention has been given to the organization of our Streets. Reforms are in progress for the better control of Street-chairs. An attempt has been made to lessen the number of Hawkers, by a new arrangement of Licenses, which makes unlicensed hawking more difficult. The carrying of Meat through the Streets has been put a stop to, except in stormy weather when boats are unavailable, and up the hill in Sai-Ying-P'ün where no plan but carrying is possible. Though more strictly a Police matter, an effort was made last summer, to prevail on the Chinese Building Contractors to stop the squeaking of the barrows used by their men. It became very evident that the noise *can* be stopped.

28. I may perhaps be allowed to suggest that if the police obtained authority to clear the Streets of the most noisy class of unlicensed hawkers, those, namely, who profess to buy old Copper and Iron, (Mái lán tung lán tít) not only a great annoyance, but also a set of receivers of goods stolen by domestic Servants would be got rid of.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

ALFRED LISTER,
Acting Registrar General.

The Honourable J. GARDINER AUSTIN,
Colonial Secretary.

No. 33.

GOVERNMENT NOTIFICATION.

The following Circular, of the 11th January, 1869, from The Right Honorable Earl GRANVILLE, K.G., Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, is published for general information.

By Command,

J. GARDINER AUSTIN,
Colonial Secretary.

Colonial Secretary's Office, Hongkong, 19th March, 1869.

Circular (1).

DOWNING STREET, 11th January, 1869.

SIR,—I transmit herewith, a copy of a Letter from the Board of Trade, suggesting that a knowledge of the International Code of Signals should be required from Candidates for the position of Masters and Mates in the Mercantile Marine.

viz.:—England.
France.
America.
Denmark.
Holland.
Sweden.
Russia.
Greece.
Italy.
Austria.
Prussia.
Spain.
Portugal.
Brazil.

That Masters and Mates of Merchant Vessels should be acquainted with a Code of Signals now adopted by the Principal Maritime Nations of the World is so obviously desirable for the interest of Commerce, that I do not doubt the Board of Trade will receive your cordial co-operation in this matter.—I have the honor to be, Sir, Your most obedient humble Servant,

GRANVILLE.

Mr. Gray to the Under Secretary of State, C. O.

BOARD OF TRADE, WHITEHALL, 11th December, 1868.

SIR,—I am directed by the Board of Trade to state, for the information of Earl Granville, that in their opinion the time has arrived when applicants for master's and mate's certificates of competency should possess a knowledge of the International Code of Signals; they have therefore issued directions under the powers vested in them by "The Merchant Shipping Act, 1854," which will prevent certificates being issued in future to any officer of the Mercantile Marine in this country, unless and until he passes a successful examination in the Commercial Code of Signals.

The Board of Trade are anxious that this additional requirement in the examination of candidates for masters and mates, examined in this country for certificates of competency, should be generally known, and they think that it would be well if a similar regulation were enforced in all British possessions abroad, where masters and mates are examined for certificates of competency.

I am, therefore, to enclose copies of the heads of examination referred to, * in order that Earl Granville may, should he see fit, communicate them to the officers administering the government of British possessions abroad.—I am, &c.

(Signed) THOMAS GRAY.

* These may be seen on application at the Harbor Master's Office.