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***SECRET  
SOCIETIES:  
A DISCUSSION  
OF THEIR  
CHARACTER  
AND CLAIMS***

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# **Secret Societies: A Discussion of Their Character and Claims**

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A PAPER ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF  
ILLINOIS OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES, AT THEIR  
MEETING IN OTTAWA, 1866.

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**CHAPTER I.**  
*Their Antiquity.*  
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Secret associations are of very ancient origin. They existed among the ancient Egyptians, Hindoos, Grecians, Romans, and probably among nearly all the pagan nations of antiquity. This fact, however is neither proof of their utility nor of their harmlessness. Slavery, despotism, cruelty, drunken falsehood, and all sorts of sins and crimes have been practiced from time immemorial, but are none the less to be reprobated on that account.

The facts that these associations had no existence among the Israelites, who, alone of all the ancient nations, enjoyed the light of Divine revelation, and that they originated and flourished among the heathen, who were vain in their imaginations; whose foolish heart was darkened, and whom God gave up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts (Rom. i: 21-24), is a presumptive proof that their nature and tendency are evil. We do not claim that all the institutions among God's ancient people were right and good; nor that every institution among the heathen was sinful and injurious; still, that which was so popular among those whom the Bible declares to have been filled with all unrighteousness; that which was so pleasing to men whom God had given over to a reprobate mind and to vile affections (Rom. i: 26-28); that which made a part of the worship which the ignorant heathen offered up to their unclean gods, and which was unknown among God's chosen people, is certainly a thing to be viewed with suspicion. A thing of so bad origin and so bad accompaniments we should be very slow to approve. The

fact that many good men see no evil in secret societies, and that many good men have been and are members of them, is more than counterbalanced by the fact that many good men very decidedly disapprove of them, and that, from time immemorial, men of vile affections and reprobate minds, men whose inclinations and consciences were perverted by heathenish ignorance and error, and by a corrupt and abominable religion, have been very fond of them.

Doubtless the authors and conductors of the ancient *mysterics* made high pretensions, just as do the modern advocates of secret societies. Perhaps the original design of the ancient mysteries was to civilize mankind and promote religion; that is, pagan superstition. But whatever may have been the *design* of the authors of them, it is certain that they became schools of superstition and vice. Their pernicious character and influence were so manifest that the ancient Christian writers almost universally exclaimed against them. (Leland's Chr. Rev., p. 223.) Bishop Warburton, who, in his "Divine Legation," maintains that the ancient mysteries were originally pure, declares that they "became abominably abused, and that in Cicero's time the terms mysteries and abominations were almost synonymous." The cause of their corruption, this eminent writer declares to be the *secrecy* with which they were performed. He says: "We can assign no surer cause of the horrid abuses and corruptions of the mysteries than the *season* in which they were represented, and the profound silence in which they were buried. Night gave opportunity to wicked men to attempt evil actions, and the secrecy encouragement to repeat them." (Leland's Chr. Rev., p. 194.) It seems to have been of these ancient secret associations that the inspired Apostle said, "*It is a shame even to speak of those things which are done in secret.*" (Eph. v: 12.)