

This duty was performed by Captain Johnson in a very satisfactory and painstaking manner; but from the fact of his being unable to reach some of the actual spots selected in Foveaux Strait, owing to rough weather, and to the difficulty of penetrating through the bush without having tracks cut (the time for doing which could not be spared), he was unable to furnish the detailed information required for the purpose of preparing designs for the various buildings required in connection with these lights. Mr. Blackett, unfortunately, was unable, on account of pressure of business in the Public Works Department, to accompany the expedition, so that it was not ascertained definitely whether the obstacles which prevented access to the sites referred to were such as presented any great engineering difficulties or not.

As the efficient lighting of Foveaux Strait is acknowledged on all hands to be urgently required, I submit that the Marine Engineer should be sent there with as little delay as possible to complete the survey and examination of the sites selected by Captain Johnson; and, on his reaching that far, it would be advisable that he should proceed on to the Snares, for the purpose of carefully examining those islets and ascertaining the best position on them for a lighthouse, so as to put the department in possession of such reliable information as will enable it to form a correct estimate of the cost of erecting and maintaining a light on them; for I think there can be no doubt that, sooner or later, the authorities in the United Kingdom and in Australia must recognize the necessity of uniting with this colony in providing the funds for establishing this much needed light.

Soon after the return of the "Luna" from the Southern trip, she was despatched to the North on a similar service. On this occasion the Marine Engineer, Captain Johnson, Mr. Wilson (who also accompanied Captain Johnson to the South), and myself, were on board. Fine weather was experienced throughout the trip, and full advantage was taken of it to carefully examine every point on the coast at which it was considered that a light was required; the exact heights and bearings being taken in every case, so that the department is now in possession of every requisite information to enable it to specify the height of tower and nature of the apparatus required for each of these lights, whenever it may be decided to proceed with their erection. The localities visited specially with reference to lighthouses, or other business connected with this department, were: Manakau Heads, Kaipara, Hokiangra, Cape Maria Van Diemen, Three Kings, Cape Reinga, North Cape, Moko Hinou Islands, Hen and Chickens, Bream Head, Tauranga, East Cape Island, Poverty Bay, and Portland Island. Excellent sites for lights were found at Motu Opao, the small island off Cape Maria Van Diemen, North Cape Island, Moko Hinou Islands, and Portland Island; a description of each is given in the report which Captain Johnson addressed to you on the 10th June last.

*Steam Tender for Lighthouse Service.*—I have already pointed out to you how necessary it will be for this department to be provided with a small steamer for attending to the lighthouses as soon as the proposed new lights are proceeded with. The "Luna" is now frequently not available just at the particular time when the lighthouses ought to be attended to; and her trips on this service have almost invariably to be hurried over in order to free her by a particular date for some other duty; the result is, that the lighthouses at a distance from Wellington cannot be visited and inspected as often as they should be. If inconvenience is now felt on this account, it must be obvious that this will be greatly increased when additional lighthouses are built, most of which will be on distant parts of the coast, remote from settlement, and which will, therefore, have to be visited more frequently by an officer of this department than is necessary in the case of lights near to the principal seaports, which are under the constant observation of the local authorities, who can report any irregularity coming under their observation.

*Lighthouse Dues.*—The amount of dues collected during the past year amounted to £8,841 11s. 4d., being £1,996 1s. 11d. in excess of the collections of the previous year; this is owing not alone to the increase in the number of ships that reached the colony last year, but also to the expansion and activity of the coasting trade. The cost of the maintenance of the coastal lighthouses in 1873-74 was £4,852 9s. 7d. It will be seen, on reference to the tables appended hereto, that this sum was less by £3,989 1s. 9d. than the amount collected for light dues; but when the projected lights are erected, the cost of maintenance will exceed the receipts; this, however, is not a matter for regret, for in a maritime colony, such as this is, any expenditure for the maintenance of lights that may have to be provided for out of the general revenue, will be repaid to the public indirectly, over and over again, by reductions in the rates of freight and insurance, which will certainly follow from the increased safety that will be afforded to shipping on our coasts by the establishment of a number of well-placed and effective lighthouses.

*Merchant Shipping Laws.*—In consequence of the important additions made last year to the Imperial Merchant Shipping laws, it became necessary, in order to preserve the harmony which has existed since the passing of "The Merchant Shipping Adoption Act, 1869," between the law in the United Kingdom and that in this colony on this important subject, to adopt several of the provisions of "The Imperial Merchant Shipping Act, 1873." A Bill has accordingly been prepared for this purpose, which, if it be passed by the Legislature, will place the laws of New Zealand, on all matters relative to masters and seamen, and to safety and prevention of accidents, on the same footing as those of the mother country. Among the provisions relating to seamen are two which are urgently required to place the law with regard to agreements with seamen on a more satisfactory footing than it is at present,—the one permits the owner or agent of home-trade ships to enter into time agreements with individual seamen to serve in any one or more ships belonging to him, which agreements need not expire on the 30th of June or 31st of December; and the other permits seamen to enter into agreements, stating the maximum period of the voyage or engagement, and the places or parts of the world (if any) to which the voyage or engagement is not to extend, instead of requiring the nature and duration of the intended voyage to be defined, as provided by section 149 of "The Merchant Shipping Act, 1854."

*Examination of Masters, Mates, and Engineers.*—The number of persons who have been examined during the year was 92. Of these, 57 passed and obtained certificates of competency of the several grades shown in the return relating to this subject appended hereto; the largest number of examinations continues to be held in Auckland.