

In a recent letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, from myself, occurs the following: " . . . as I need hardly, I think, in view of the petition to Her Majesty which has lately been forwarded, remind your Lordship that very great discontent indeed prevails in Fiji with the present condition of affairs political there, and that I was and am apprehensive that, unless some radical change, in more particularly the policy of the government of the natives, shortly ensues, this discontent will eventuate in some overt act . . . ; and that these apprehensions are shared by others as well as myself, is evident, as witness the last Wesleyan missionary report held at Bau, and by the evidence of all best qualified to judge outside official circles."

About a month ago, a number of natives, one of whom was a district chief, told me that if I could succeed in what I told them I was coming to Sydney to endeavour to bring about, "they would love me to a man." And the native governor of a province lately said "that the whites wished to have transactions with the natives and the natives with the whites, without which his people would have to go naked, but the Governor had put a fence between them, so high that it will soon fall down."

I will shortly state what the people I represent want, and what they expect at the hands of the Convention. They want a Government under which they can live, and enjoy those political privileges Englishmen are accustomed to elsewhere. They want a Government that will foster trade and promote the agricultural and commercial interests of the colony. They want a Government that will be in sympathy with the people, and which does not look with supercilious indifference on those they are sent to govern. They want a voice in the expenditure of their own money; they want trial by jury: and they want a total abolition of the slavery of the natives, and recognition of a man's innate right to sell his labour, where and when, and in what direction he pleases.

To obtain these objects they want either federation with or annexation to the "Dominion of Australasia," or one of the States composing that Dominion; and they expect, I may add, ardently, the Convention will pass such resolutions and make such representations to the Imperial Government as will support the prayer of their petition, and forward the objects they have in view.

R. BECKWITH LEEFE,

Representing the People of Fiji.

N.B.—When the words "slavery," "slave," occur in this memorandum, the slavery of the people by the Government through the chiefs is intended to be understood.

R.B.L.

No. 3.

MINUTE by Hon. Mr. THURSTON, on the PETITION to the QUEEN.

MINUTE with reference to a Petition addressed to the Queen by certain of the Colonists of Fiji, praying See A.—3, Sess. I. that the Colony may be either incorporated with one of the Australian Colonies, or that p. 30.

British-born Residents within the Colony may be relieved from what they regard as their present humiliating position.

THE chief grounds for the general complaints set forth in this petition are contained in its 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 15th, 16th, and 17th paragraphs, the others being apparently inserted more as the recital of historical and admitted facts, necessary to a full understanding of the subject, than for any other purpose.

But it is to be observed that, even in this intended recital of facts, such mistakes occur in respect of matters which ought to be known to the petitioners, and especially so to the movers in the matter (among whom is an ex-Attorney-General), that a doubt at once raises itself as to the accuracy of their information in other particulars.

Before touching upon the several subjects alleged in this petition to be matters of grievance, I propose to point out the mistakes referred to above. Paragraph 5 describes the Executive Council as consisting ordinarily of the Governor, the Colonial Secretary, the Attorney-General, the Receiver-General, and the Agent-General of Immigration. As a fact, the Executive Council ordinarily consists of the Governor and the two first-named officers only. There are, however, other members (some of whom are appointed for special purposes by Statute); but the Agent-General of Immigration is neither now, nor ever has been, a member of the Executive Council. But, as no special grievance is raised as to the constitution of the Executive Council, this matter is only worthy of notice as indicating want of knowledge on the part of persons professing to be acquainted with public affairs of the Colony.

Paragraph 6, in like manner, wrongly describes the persons constituting the Legislative Council: the official members of Executive Council, other than the special members before referred to, and such persons holding public office as may be appointed—the whole number not exceeding six. The full Council may not exceed twelve, of whom one-half shall at all times be official members. In the absence of members, whether official or non-official, provisional members may be appointed. In point of fact, the non-official element in the Council has always been kept at its full strength. The Chief Justice is not, as alleged in the petition, a member of the Council. He is so if appointed, but not otherwise.

There is another statement in the prefatory part of the petition requiring notice, less perhaps upon the ground of inaccuracy than because of the loose way in which it is put forward. This statement is contained in paragraph 3, and for purposes of special import it professes to give the numerical strength of the present European and Native population of the Colony. It is said that the present population consists of 110,000 native-born Fijians and of 2,560 Europeans and other foreign residents, exclusive of labourers introduced from other of the Pacific Islands and from India.

For the purposes of the statement, as aiding in the correct appreciation of the administrative necessities (both executive and legislative) of the Colony, it is necessary that the numerical strength of the races forming the population should be given with greater accuracy, and that the state and inter-relations of the 2,500 Europeans and other inhabitants be ascertained.