

sailed among the islands may conduct himself decently, without any great trouble, during a short stay in Melbourne or Sydney, and it is on the character borne *in the colony* that the police base their recommendation to issue or withhold a license—a recommendation almost invariably followed. In point of fact, we ourselves know instances of licenses having been given to persons of more than doubtful antecedents, but whose acts in Australia had not been such as to call for the animadversion of the police.

155. We suggest, therefore, that the present mode of appointing labour agents by the different Colonial Governments should cease; that the licensing of vessels should be done away with, and that, in future, licenses should be issued by each Deputy Commissioner for his own district, the master of every vessel engaged on a recruiting voyage being bound in the first instance to report himself to the Deputy Commissioner, from whom he should receive a license setting forth the islands within the district at which he may recruit, and the number of men who may be taken from each. Each Deputy Commissioner should also be authorized to enrol such a number of men as labour agents as would meet the requirements of his district, and, whenever he grants a license to a vessel as suggested by us, one of these agents should at the same time be placed on board.

156. This agent should accompany the vessel during the cruise to preserve an entire control over the recruiting operations, to keep an accurate record of all the proceedings in which natives are concerned, and to report to the Deputy Commissioner before she finally sails for her destination in the colonies.

157. We imagine that the number of agents who would be required would not be large, probably not exceeding ten to twelve, and we are of opinion that the expenses attending their employment, &c., should be divided between the High Commission and the charterers or owners of the vessel.

158. The payment by the former should, we think, consist of a fixed sum as permanent salary, and that by the latter of a capitation allowance for each recruit obtained, but to be levied and paid through the High Commission.

159. Into the question of the treatment received by the immigrants in the colonies where they are employed it is not our province to enter. We believe that it is on the whole, and with but occasional exceptions, neither unkind nor unjust. But it is nevertheless a fact, and it is one to which we think it our duty to call attention, that the mortality among this class is exceptionally high, and in some cases appalling. This not only attracts our attention on grounds of humanity, but produces two results, both of which are undesirable: it accelerates the depopulation of the islands, and it renders far more serious the suspicions excited in the islands by the non-return of those who have disappeared.

160. In some cases the mortality on board the vessels conveying labourers to Queensland and Fiji has been very great, and we consider that the prohibition of labour voyages during the hurricane months should be rigidly insisted on, while the recommendation made by the Secretary of State to the Fiji Government in 1879, to the effect that all vessels engaged in the labour trade for any long period should carry a medical officer (who might, perhaps, also act as labour agent), merits serious attention.

161. We are of opinion that the provisions of the Fiji Ordinance No. VI. of 1878, with respect to non-allotment of immigrants to unhealthy estates, should be strictly enforced, and that similar provisions should be insisted upon as a condition of the continuance of the employment of Polynesian labour in Queensland.

162. In connection with this subject we desire to call attention to the evidence of Dr. Macgregor, Chief Medical Officer of Fiji, appended to this report.*

163. Independently of the labourers employed in the plantations of Queensland and Fiji, a large number of natives find occupation on board of the trading vessels, as seamen, in the preparation of copra, and on the bêche-de-mer and pearl-shell fisheries dispersed amongst the islands of the West Pacific. These labourers are engaged under a license given to the employers by the Governors of the different colonies from which they sail, or from Her Majesty's Consul at Noumea. The employment of labour under these conditions is even more open to abuse than that of the regular labour traffic to the colonies, which is ostensibly under some regulations, and is provided with Government agents to check irregularities.

164. We would suggest that the owner or charterer of any vessel intending to employ native labourers amongst the islands should be required to obtain a license to do so from the Deputy Commissioner residing in the group from which he intended to enlist the men, and also enter into a bond to return his labourers to their respective homes at the termination of their engagement.

165. The power of granting or withholding such license should, we think, lie entirely with such Deputy Commissioner, who would be guided by the antecedents of the applicant, and his character amongst the islanders in making his decision.

166. In New South Wales alone, seventeen licenses were granted in 1879 for the employment of 494 natives; in 1880, fifteen vessels were licensed to employ 390 natives; and in 1881, amongst others, one vessel alone was licensed to carry eighty labourers between New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The bulk of these licenses are granted for under a year, but in some cases they extend to the full time of three years. It might be expedient, when the numbers to be entered are large, that an agent should be placed on board to superintend the entry as in the case of the regular labour-trading vessels. It will be seen that we rely chiefly on regulations, and the local knowledge of the Deputy Commissioner, as the main check on this class of labour trade.

167. The Deputy Commissioner would of course require documentary proof of the entry, return, and payment of the natives thus employed; but these details would be better elaborated after some experience on the spot had been obtained.

* Appendix C.