

*Compiling and Printing the Laws.*

The compiling and printing of the laws passed by Parliament and in force on 31st December, 1896, has been proceeded with as fast as our limited means of printing would permit. We hope to be able to lay before you the English version. The Maori version, carefully revised, will follow. We propose asking you for a vote in order that the laws passed by the Councils of the several islands of the Federation may be similarly treated. All our laws have been published in the parliamentary blue-books of New Zealand, with the despatches sent by the British Resident, but many so published are in English only, while the means of publication here till lately were confined to writing and its duplication. Now that we have a printing-press available the difficulty hitherto experienced will be overcome.

*New Laws.*

The importation of wax matches has begun, and we regard them as exceptionally dangerous to life among children, and to property by fire, in the condition of these islands. The wooden matches hitherto used are safer, and we shall submit a law prohibiting the importation of wax matches for your consideration.

We consider that the time has come when provision should be made to fix individual responsibility in case of compensation by damage being sought for personal libels published in these islands, and we shall propose to you a law compelling the registration of the printer and the publisher of all papers that may be issued for circulation.

*Federal Court.*

Experience has proved that, in the absence of Judge Te Pou-o-te-Rangi, it is not possible to find a Judge sufficiently acquainted with European law and customs to deal with the increasing number of disputes, commercial and others, in which Europeans and Maoris, or Europeans alone, are concerned. This has given to us great anxiety and received our careful consideration. The principles and procedure of English law are required in such a Court, while a due regard must be paid to Maori customs and methods, especially as no trained legal assistance is available in the preparation of documents or in legal action among us. Without complete confidence in the efficiency and justice of our Courts the whole Government must come to an end, and the Maoris submit to be governed by others instead of being a self-governing people. We are not yet prepared with measures on this important subject for your consideration, but hope to lay them before you during the session.

*The Hospital.*

The Act passed last session for the formation of a Hospital Board, and the transference to it of the control and management of the Hospital, has been brought into operation. The Board has been elected, and the Hospital placed under its control. In accordance with the Act, the report of the Board and the accounts of its expenditure will be laid before you when they are received by the Government.

In connection with the Hospital a difficulty has occurred which should, we consider, be met by legislation. Section 1 of the Import Duty Amendment Act of 1895, under which the revenue for the Hospital is collected, provides that this revenue "shall be applied to the erection and maintenance of a Hospital, at which advice and general medical or surgical treatment shall be given without charge to all applicants, within certain hours to be fixed by the Chief of the Government." The hour was fixed at from 8 to 9 in Government regulations published on the 25th April, 1896. The Board published, on the 17th April, 1897, a new set of regulations by which free treatment was limited to those who might obtain an order from a member of the Board. The rates of admission were also changed without the previous Government regulations being rescinded. The British Resident called the attention of the Board to the law, and to the anomaly of two conflicting sets of regulations, but was of opinion that the Government should not interfere. The position of the Board must be taken into account. It has small funds at disposal, and every one must desire to see the Hospital a success. At the same time, it is desirable that the present complication should be ended. With this view, as the Board has been re-elected by the public to whom it is answerable, we feel justified in proposing to you a repeal of the provision for free treatment. This will enable the Government to rescind the regulations of 1896 without making itself a party to breaking the law, and will leave the Board free to make such regulations as it may consider the circumstances require and the public may approve.

*The Wharf.*

Message No. 2 of last session embodied the arrangement with the Union Steamship Company of New Zealand (Limited) for the building of wharf-sheds. The company has not only built large and commodious sheds, but an excellent wharf, which will be of great benefit to the people of all the islands who send away produce or receive supplies through Rarotonga. The original arrangement with the company provided for sheds only, but has since been practically extended to include the wharf. The company is thus secure that its tenure will not be disturbed without equitable repayment of the outlay in this valuable public work. We have further arranged with Karika (Ariki) to pay to him a yearly sum of £5, in consideration of which he conveys to the Federal Government all his interest in the land on the harbour frontage, which includes that on which the wharf and sheds stand. The Federal Government are to hold this land so long as they require it for public purposes. Any possible monopoly of landing accommodation is thus guarded against, while the arrangement with the company is simplified and outside interference avoided.

*The Revenue.*

The receipts for the year ending 30th June have been only £1,230 2s. 9d., against £1,428 17s. 8d. for the previous year. The poor coffee-crop of 1898, and consequent decreased purchasing-power of the people, induced us to estimate only £1,250 for the revenue of 1896-97, which estimate has proved very nearly right. For the coming year we may rely on a revenue in face of the excellent coffee-crop now being gathered. We hope to find the coffee-crop increasing yearly from increased plantation and care, which alone can add to the wealth and prosperity of the Cook Islands.

*The Expenditure*

For the year ending 30th June has been £1,654 0s. 3d., against £1,441 0s. 8d. for 1895-96. The outstanding liabilities for 1895-96 were £218. Those for this year are estimated at £110. Full accounts will, as usual, be laid before you when closed and audited for the year. Meanwhile we have elsewhere summarised the receipts and expenditure for your information.

*The Imports*

For the year were £24,628 15s., against £25,665 for the previous year. Of the imports for this year £5,975 were duty free, being goods admitted free here or re-exported to other islands. Casks and fruit-cases, &c., are also duty free.

*The Exports*

Amounted for the year in gross to £16,196, against £20,720 for the previous year. Of the exports, only £14,766 were the produce of the Cook Islands, against £17,026 for the previous year. The balance in each year consisted of produce from other islands. The usual detailed return of imports and exports will be laid before you.