

No. 20.

(No. 75.)

SIR,—

Government House, Wellington, 25th November, 1897.

A.—2, 1898,
Nos. 2, 23.

I have the honour to inform you, in reference to despatch No. 15, New Zealand, of the 30th April, 1897, and further despatch No. 43, New Zealand, of the 12th August, 1897, that my Premier informs me that the subject of these two despatches—"Shipping and Seamen's Act Amendment Act, 1896"—is still engaging the consideration of the Government.

I have, &c.,

The Right Hon. J. Chamberlain, M.P., &c.,
Secretary of State for the Colonies.

RANFURLY.

No. 21.

(No. 77.)

SIR,—

Government House, Wellington, 7th December, 1897.

No. 12.

In continuation of my despatch No. 59, New Zealand, of the 23rd October, 1897, I have the honour to inform you that H.M.S. "Torch" was despatched to Fiji to take the Chief Justice to Rarotonga. She started on the 12th November, but, owing to a heavy sea, put back some five hours later. The senior officer of the "Torch" was then informed that the vessel would not be further required.

The High Commissioner forwarded me a despatch stating that, owing to public business in the law-courts, the Chief Justice would be unable to start before the 11th December without gravely inconveniencing public business, and asking for H.M.S. "Mildura" in place of H.M.S. "Torch," which latter vessel the Chief Justice reported as unfitted for the service required. His Excellency the Admiral having selected the "Torch" for that service, I did not see my way to asking His Excellency to make any change in the arrangements.

The Chief Justices's proposal to leave Fiji on the 11th December per s.s. "Hauroto," and to proceed *via* Auckland to Rarotonga, did not meet with the approval of my Premier, who considered that it would be more satisfactory if the officer selected should proceed in one of Her Majesty's ships, in order to impress the natives with the importance attached to the inquiry. In this I most fully agree with him. The date of the arrival of the Chief Justice of Fiji at Rarotonga would be most uncertain, as it depended on the sailing of the "Upolu" for Auckland, and the company's agents thought this vessel might be laid up for repairs in December; so, in order to avoid further delay, I have sent a despatch to the High Commissioner informing him that arrangements have been made for the Chief Justice of New Zealand (Sir James Prendergast) to start forthwith, and asking him to cancel any Commission issued to Sir H. Berkeley.

I append herewith a copy of the instructions I have issued to Sir James Prendergast, which I trust will meet with your approval.

I have found this matter very difficult to deal with, as in my Commission my power with regard to these islands is undefined.

From former despatches I can find no authority, these islands being a Protectorate, to send a regular Commission; and the instructions therefore given to Sir James Prendergast will not enable him to compel the attendance of witnesses, or to take sworn evidence. However, the question of informing Her Majesty's Government as to the true state of affairs was of such importance, and an inquiry having been asked for by both sides, I considered, after consultation with my Advisers, that no other course was open to me.

The revenues of the islands are at the present time being collected and administered by the British Resident. This course, the British Resident reported to me, he was forced to adopt owing to the collapse of the parliamentary Government, though one I do not consider he was legally entitled to pursue.

I consider it necessary, with a view to the better government of these islands, that the present system should be radically changed, but till I receive