

No. 6.

Mr. F. J. Moss to His Excellency the GOVERNOR.

SIR,—

Cook Islands, British Residency, Rarotonga, 21st August, 1897.

At the request of Dr. George Craig, I have the honour to enclose to your Excellency the copy of a letter sent by him to me on the 16th instant (with the said copy in his writing for the purpose of transmission), and in which Dr. Craig makes certain statements as to “the disgracefully drunken habits of the natives,” “the sale of liquor permits by the Arikis (the chiefs) to all-comers,” “the open and illicit sale of liquor to natives and Europeans at so much money per drink,” and “the poison so constantly sold to the unsophisticated native as rum.”

These statements are more or less founded on fact, as your Excellency will have already learned from my despatch of the 25th July (No. 8/97).

As put by Dr. Craig, I have no hesitation in describing them as gross exaggerations.

My attention was first drawn to an evident relaxation of the law by passing several tipsy natives returning from the May mission meeting at Arorangi, which was held this year on the Queen's Birthday. I at once wrote to the Ariki of Arorangi expressing a hope that the men would be fined, and be refused further permits for liquor till they have proved themselves fit to have them. Since then feasts of various kinds have been frequent and upsetting, especially those connected with a visit from the young representative of Tahitian Royalty, who is still in Rarotonga with his suite, has been received with a round of festivity by the Maoris, and feasted them bountifully in return. The time selected by Dr. Craig for his comments must therefore be regarded as exceptional.

I have written at different times to Arikis and Judges on this subject, but can only hope to see a remedy provided when the Rarotonga Council meets. The liquor-law is in its hands, and not in the hands of the Federal Parliament.

The issue of permits for natives by the Arikis is the weak point in the law. They depute some one to sign for them, and the agent is almost as a matter of course the Judge of the Arikis' Court, an hereditary officer of high rank, and by old customs the Arikis' “mouthpiece.”

Great care will have to be taken in effecting a change, or we shall only reproduce the bribery and corruption which prevailed prior to the initiation of the present form of government in 1891, and in face of which the open charging of a recognised and fixed fee, however reprehensible in itself, is a clear advance.

It is not yet four years since Judges and police—the latter an extremely numerous body, and, with the Judges, composed exclusively of mission church members—depended entirely for their pay on the fines they could extort by unceasing espionage, night and day, in the attempt to make the people moral and pure by compulsion of law. Years will be required to wipe away the effects of this pernicious system, to which my early despatches drew special notice. A gradual improvement is all that the most sanguine could hope.

These circumstances have to be borne in mind, and it is charitable to conclude that Dr. Craig, who has only been here four or five months, is ignorant of their full effect. The peculiarity of his present complaint is that I find the Arikis and Judges have been led to believe that it is against the British Resident and the Licensing Officer, and a matter with which they have no concern. I enclose a circular for your Excellency's information which I have been obliged to address to them on this point.

In further explanation of Dr. Craig's action, I have to state that on his arrival here (29th March) the Hospital Board arranged with him to take the hospital revenue, and practically to farm the institution, providing for the nursing, feeding, and attention to the patients at his own cost. This led to violation of the law, and brought the Government (and through it the British Resident) and the Board into collision, as reported in my despatch of the 22nd July (No. 7/97). Under this arrangement the Hospital has abolished the hour of free treatment to all-comers previously required by law, and become so unpopular that it has dwindled to a single patient, while the term “out-patients,” used in the hospital reports, means only those who are attended in Dr. Craig's private practice in the usual way.

Why Dr. Craig should have made this matter personal between himself and the British Resident I cannot say, but that he has done so is a matter of notoriety here. I have always regarded him as skilful in his profession, and welcomed him warmly as a very desirable addition to our small society. He has, however, constituted himself the most active member of the small band whom the British Resident has at various times been compelled to cross, and who devote themselves to poisoning the minds of the Maoris, and obstructing the government of the islands. In proof I need only mention that the mischievously worded petition against the Federal Court Bill was presented to the Cook Islands Parliament in Dr. Craig's handwriting, and had been for some days quietly—almost secretly—taken round by a person employed by him to obtain the few signatures attached to it when presented.

I have, &c.,

FREDERICK J. MOSS,

British Resident.

His Excellency the Administrator of the Government, &c., New Zealand.

Enclosure No. 1.

SIR,—

Rarotonga, 16th August, 1897.

In my report of the 10th July, on the diseases due to alcohol among the natives of Rarotonga, there occurs the statement that there are special facilities and encouragement given in this community for the liquor traffic among natives.