

No. 26.

Sir JAMES PRENDERGAST to His Excellency the GOVERNOR.

MY LORD,—

Government House, Wellington, 28th February, 1898.

I have the honour to forward a paper prepared by the Licensing Officer at Rarotonga relating to the working of the licensing-law in force there.

I have, &c.,

His Excellency the Right Hon. the Earl of Ranfurly, &c.,
Governor of New Zealand.

JAMES PRENDERGAST.

Enclosure.

SIR,—

Rarotonga, 1st February, 1898.

In accordance with your request, I have the honour to forward the following report :—

The liquor-law (Rarotonga Council) of 1890, passed by the Rarotonga Council, and approved by the British Resident, applies only to the Island of Rarotonga. No law regarding liquor save total prohibition exists in any other island of the group to my knowledge.

For some six years after the law first came into operation I cannot say, with one exception, that any complaint could reasonably be made. The exception to which I allude is the signing of permits by persons authorised by the Arikis to do so. These persons were in the habit of making a charge for issuing the permission to purchase liquor as required by law. I remonstrated with them repeatedly, but without any permanent improvement. My remonstrances might meet with attention for a short time, but the old indiscriminate issuing of permits was soon resumed. Ultimately I was compelled to refuse all permits not signed by the Ariki's own hand, and I still do so. The result has been that very few natives now present themselves with permissions to purchase drink—in fact, as at present administered, almost “total prohibition” has been the result for the natives.

Retailing liquor must also have received a great check by my action in this matter, as suspected retailers can no longer send natives to purchase permits and obtain liquor to dispose of by the glass or otherwise. I have found Europeans and other foreigners far more to the front in abusing the liquor-law than the natives, both in resorting to various subterfuges to obtain liquor and in deceiving me as to the purposes for which such liquor was required. Whenever such practices have come under my notice I have prosecuted the parties, and in some cases a heavy penalty has been inflicted on the offenders. I do not think it necessary to mention names, but shall do so if required.

I cannot supply particulars of convictions for drunkenness, that being in the hands of the Judges. I attribute the paucity of convictions to the incompetence of the police, and their indifference, and to the partiality on the part of the Judges. Natives will not prosecute their own relatives and friends, nor will the Judges convict under similar circumstances. I look on it as hopeless to expect natives of this group to act impartially or efficiently as police; they are all more or less related to each other, no matter from what island of the group they come. Prosecutions will not be properly entered upon until a European is placed in charge of the police, and the natives employed under him are brought from Fiji or elsewhere, and not in any way connected with the group. As at present administered—that is to say, with the restriction regarding permission to purchase being signed only by the Ariki's own hand—I do not think any improvement can be effected. Small abuses may occur from time to time, but I cannot see how, without legislation altering the whole system, these could be prevented. The main feature of abuse in the past has been the issue of permits to natives, and that, as before pointed out, I have stopped.

To my mind, legislation altering the entire system might be worthy of consideration. Two methods present themselves—viz., total prohibition for foreigners and natives alike. The island is isolated, and, although this system failed in the past, it is now quite practicable under present circumstances. Before the establishment of Customhouses and officers in the group no check of any kind was possible on vessels doing business here. The necessity of captains of ships returning landing certificates for all liquor shipped as cargo to port of shipment now imposes a check which did not previously exist. Of course, European officers would have to be appointed for each principal island of the group, as natives are not to be depended on. The second alternative points to some adaptation of the Gottenberg system, or Government control of the trade. The Government should in that case be the only importer of and dealer in liquor. A house should be opened in Avarua by the Government, and some proper and respectable person employed to conduct it. Liquor could be sold by the glass, to be drunk on the premises standing, no seats being allowed; not more than, say, one pint of spirits allowed to be purchased and taken home at one time, except on special occasions, such as a large social gathering or medical order, wine and beer to be specially provided for. The isolation of the island would be in its favour, and foreigners and natives could in that case be treated alike.

I have to thank you for your suggestion about opening an office for the issue of permits in a more central position, and have to report my doing so with satisfactory results.

I have, &c.,

J. H. GARNIER,
Licensing Officer.

His Honour Sir James Prendergast, Wellington.