

1901.

NEW ZEALAND.

THE POSITION IN FIJI:

BEING AN INTERVIEW WITH REV. MR. SLADE, WESLEYAN MISSIONARY, FIJI, PUBLISHED IN
THE AUCKLAND EVENING STAR OF THE 23RD JULY, 1901.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Leave.

THE Rev. Mr. Slade, the well-known Wesleyan missionary at Fiji, arrived in Auckland by the s.s. "Fiona" last night, on a brief holiday visit. Mr. Slade's name has been before the public lately owing to the action of Sir George O'Brien, Governor of Fiji, who endeavoured to secure his removal from the group. Interviewed by a representative of the *Star* at Devonport, this morning, Mr. Slade gave his views on the Fijian Government system. In reply to a question, Mr. Slade said that the trouble between himself and the Governor had arisen over a letter published in the *Fiji Times*, and reprinted in the *Review of Reviews*, in which he advocated the federation of Fiji with New Zealand. This greatly angered Sir George O'Brien, and he accused Mr. Slade of carrying out an agitation among the natives, with federation as its object, and a lot of so-called evidence of this was forwarded to the Missionary Society, with a request for Mr. Slade's removal, stating that the Governor did not wish to deport him, owing to the office he held. The Missionary Society, as there was no evidence to justify it, refused the Governor's request, and the matter ended in its withdrawal.

How about the present position in Fiji?—Well, I suppose you have seen that last Ordinance with reference to those attempting to induce Fijians to take any action having for its object the alteration of the present form of Government. That Ordinance has met with much disapproval, and there is a strong feeling that it should not be allowed at Home. It was sprung as a surprise on the Council, being passed in less than three-quarters of an hour. The Governor spoke very strongly on the matter, and made out that he had information that made such an Ordinance imperative. He thus frightened some of the members, and the Ordinance was opposed by but one member, Mr. Burton.

His Excellency seems to be something of an autocrat?—Yes; the Government is entirely an autocracy; but under no Governor, in my experience, has this autocracy been so severely felt as under the present administrator. Sir George O'Brien is a very able man in such matters as the building of roads, bridges, &c., but in the higher portions of a Governor's work, such as the knowledge of the natives, their condition, and their requirements, he is very much at fault. This is due to the fact that he has never gone about the country, but has acquired all information by minutes from heads of departments. He is almost unknown to the Europeans at Fiji, and has never had conversations with any one outside the Government to find out what the natives are like. He speaks of the Fijians as an excitable race; while, as a matter of fact, there never was a more phlegmatic people. The general feeling in Fiji is that the Ordinance already referred to was aimed at one man, Mr. Humphrey Berkeley, whom the Governor professes to consider a very dangerous man. I do not think he has sufficient influence to cause trouble, even if he desired it. The missionaries have the strongest influence among the natives, and, of course, that influence is wholly on the side of peace. Fiji was ceded to Britain mainly as a result of missionary influence, and it cannot be doubted that the missionaries are still loyal, so that any suggestion of their stirring up strife would be absurd.

Has Sir George left the group yet? He was to leave on Thursday, the day after my departure. He has now been in the group four years, and the custom is that the fifth year is taken as leave of absence, so that it is improbable that he will return. He is absolutely tactless, and has never endeavoured to find out by personal experience the feelings of the people he governed. The Magistrates of the various districts do much of the administrative work, and the Government has recently appointed Native Inspectors, who report to the Governor. I have seen some of the diaries of these Inspectors, and certainly some very odd writing has been done in them. The Governor is a man readily influenced by panic, and probably the Ordinance may have been caused by something submitted by an Inspector.

Sir George opposes the federation of Fiji with either Australia or New Zealand?—Yes, he appears to make a personal matter of it. I have taken an interest in the matter because I