

1901.
NEW ZEALAND.

THE POSITION IN FIJI:

COPY OF LETTER FROM REV. W. SLADE.

Laid on the Table of the House of Representatives by Leave.

DEAR MR. SEDDON,—

Devonport, Auckland, 29th July, 1901.

Once again I have to thank the New Zealand Government for its influential intervention in the affairs of Fiji.

It has gratified me exceedingly to read in the public Press that Mr. Chamberlain has suspended the atrocious Ordinance which was the last baneful act of Sir G. M. O'Brien's rule in Fiji.

I hope that your representations will succeed in not only securing the suspension but also the cancellation of the attempt to rob Englishmen of their birthright—free speech. It is to strengthen your hands I now write.

We missionaries know the natives better than the officers of the Fiji Government, and it came as a great surprise to us that the Fiji Government should deem such an Ordinance necessary. Until my departure from the group a fortnight ago I was acting-chairman of the Wesleyan Mission, and was in constant communication with my colleagues. None of us had heard of any movement to call for that Ordinance. Sir G. M. O'Brien really knows nothing of the Fijians, and, being strangely subject to panic, interprets a fit of obstinacy on the part of one or two natives as an indication of a widespread disaffection.

When Sir George made his notorious and libellous Wainibokasi speech he justified his action to one of our number by saying that the Federation party in Suva had sent emissaries to persuade the natives not to pay taxes. Now, at that moment the Mission Synod was in session, and attending it were many of the native ministers—men who, being Fijians, know all that is passing in the villages. I made it my business to particularly inquire from all of them whether they had heard of such emissaries, or of even a message having such a meaning. Not one had heard anything of the kind.

I believe Sir G. M. O'Brien's statement of probable trouble to be just as groundless. Fiji is quiet and orderly. Discontent there undoubtedly is; but it is caused entirely by the extremely irksome system of government. One cannot expect but that natives whose eyes are being more and more opened by education, and by contact with foreign peoples, will become discontented under regulations which make it necessary for a man to ask an official's permission before he may go to sell a basket of yams, and that places the whole race under the absolute rule of commissioners and inspectors, who issue orders, prosecute for disobedience, and themselves try their own prosecutions.

Had Sir G. O'Brien sat less on his dignity and moved freely among those who know Fiji and its people, he might have learnt something of what the natives really are, and been less likely to be influenced by the recklessly inaccurate reports furnished by his officers.

That the condition of Fiji calls for an Ordinance so un-English as the one just suspended is as gross a libel on the Islands as the Wainibokasi speech was on your colony.

I should like to present my respects to you in person and tell you more about Fijian affairs than the limits of a letter allow. I regret that the shortness of my present visit precludes me from reaching Wellington and from the honour of personal acquaintance at the present time.

I have the honour to be,

Your obedient servant,

W. SLADE.

The Right Hon. R. J. Seddon, Wellington.

Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, not given; printing (1,375 copies), 17s. 6d.

By Authority: JOHN MACKAY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1901.

Price 3d.