

1901.
NEW ZEALAND.

WAINIBOKASI HOSPITAL, FIJI.

(OPENING OF THE).

Laid on the Table of both Houses by Leave.

SPEECH DELIVERED BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR OF FIJI,
SIR G. O'BRIEN.

[Extract from *Fiji Times*, 31st October, 1900.]

ON Tuesday, the 23rd, His Excellency the Governor, accompanied by the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Allardyce, the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Sutherland, and Dr. and Mrs. Prior, proceeded by launch to Rewa for the purpose of opening the first of the new provincial hospitals which the Government is establishing in several of the outlying districts for the reception and treatment of Native patients.

The Governor and party reached the Hospital wharf at Wainibokasi a little after noon, where they were met by Dr. Withington and several other officials, and escorted to a large Native-built marquee which had been erected in the Hospital grounds, and where a number of Europeans and all the leading chiefs and people of the three provinces of Tailevu, Rewa, and Naitaisiri, including the Roko Tui Tailevu, Roko Tui Rewa, with their Bulis, numbering close on a thousand people, had assembled to witness the opening ceremony. Noticeable amongst the spectators were the Rev. Dr. Brown, the Rev. — Lane, and all the members of the Wesleyan Mission, and several of the priests from the Roman Catholic Mission-station at Rewa.

The weather was exceptionally fine, and everything bore quite a gala appearance, the Hospital buildings being decorated for the occasion with flags and festoons of flowers, and the grounds, which only very recently had been a wilderness of grass, had been cleared and laid out in food and flower gardens.

The opening proceedings—viz., the making of the “yaqona,” and the presentation of the bowl, of which His Excellency partook, with the usual accompaniment of native song—having been got through, the Governor addressed the assemblage in the following terms:—

Roko Tui Tailevu, Roki Tui Rewa, and you other chiefs and men of Rewa and the neighbouring provinces,—I am very glad to see you all assembled here to-day to witness the opening of the Wainibokasi Hospital.

2. The building of the Hospital and doctor's quarters has cost some £1,400, and Government has spared no expense in fitting it up and equipping it with everything necessary so that the sick in these provinces may here receive gratis the best possible medical treatment.

3. It is only lately that Government has had money at its disposal to try and improve the material condition of the Fijian people. Since it has had the money it has lost no time in spending it for the benefit of the Fijians. Other hospitals are being erected in other provinces, creeks are being bridged, and where the water-supply is bad a good supply is being laid on at the expense of the Government. You in Rewa have benefited by the Rewa water-supply; and in Tailevu also, and in other provinces, works are being undertaken to provide the people with wholesome water for drinking and cooking.

4. Talking of the Rewa water-supply, I may tell you what happened the other night in Suva at a meeting which was held in favour of federation with New Zealand—that is to say, in favour of giving over to New Zealand this country of Fiji, which the Fijians gave to Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria. Well, at this federation meeting mention was made of the Rewa water-supply. And what do you think was said about it? Why, it was said that it was absurd to supply you with water, and that it was very wrong to have spent the money that has been spent in doing so. It was said that all the villages that had been supplied lie on the banks of the Rewa, and that the Rewa water which was good enough for your forefathers was good enough for you. The Rewa water, by the way, as is usual in tidal rivers, is uncommonly brackish; but never mind about that. And the speaker also said that he was sure that every one at the meeting agreed with him that what he called the absurd Rewa water scheme was one on which it was very wrong to have spent money, and which never would have been carried out by any kind of Government except the Government which you now have. The people at the meeting did not contradict him, and I suppose that they

all thought he was quite right, for they were of the party that wish to give your country to New Zealand. Now, why do I mention this to you? It is in order that you may see how little those people know or care about the Fijians. As, of course, you all know, the villages that have been supplied with water do not lie on the banks of the Rewa, but are, many of them, many miles distant from the Rewa. But what should people who wish to give your country away care about that, or care about you? In those distant villages Fijian men, or women, or children might be lying sick, or might be even dying, and what about them? Well, the New Zealand party has said that the Rewa water is good enough for them; so I suppose that if they are parched with thirst they ought to get up, if they can, and walk miles to the Rewa to find brackish water to quench it.

5. That, I think, will show you pretty clearly how much the New Zealand party care about you and your welfare. They pretend to be your friends, I know, and they have their own purpose to serve by doing so. But I will tell you one thing, and that is this: When persons who have never during all their lives done a single thing to benefit you all of a sudden appear to become very fond of you, and say to you they will do you all manner of good if you will only listen to their advice, you will do very well to ask yourself the question, "What is it that we have got that these persons want to get from us?"

6. If the chiefs and the more intelligent amongst you ask yourselves the question, What has this New Zealand party got to gain from us? you will not have to wait very long before you see the answer. You have the land, my friends, and that is what they want to get, and hope that they will get if you are foolish enough to listen to them. It has always been the same in every country under the kind of Government that there is in New Zealand—the white men have always taken the land from the coloured owners. It has been so in New Zealand, where the land once all belonged to the coloured people. Who owns that land now? The white people have got nearly the whole of it. The coloured people are cooped up in the fragment of land that has been left to them, and many of them have no land at all.

7. What has happened in New Zealand to the coloured people's land will happen here, too, if New Zealand gets this country. But you have been told that if New Zealand gets this country the natives will not have to pay native taxes. Of course, the persons who have told you this have done so to tempt you to listen to them, in order that, if you are foolish enough, you may think it a good thing that New Zealand should get this country. Therefore they tell you that if you were under the New Zealand Government you would not have to pay native taxes. But they do not tell you that if you paid no native taxes you would, like the coloured people in New Zealand, lose nearly all your land.

8. For what, after all, are those so-called native taxes that you have to pay? I will tell you. They amount to less than £1 a head a year for each adult male, and they are the rent which the Fijian people pay for the lands that they are not actually cultivating. Under the Act of Cession, by which the father of Roko Tui Tailevu, and the other great chiefs of Fiji, on behalf of themselves and their several tribes, made over the country to Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, it was agreed that the Fijians should keep the lands they were cultivating, and that all the rest should belong to Government. But when it was found that this did not please the chiefs and people, the Government allowed them to have all the unoccupied lands, and in return got from them the small rent which is known by the name of native taxes. So you see, if you were to cease to pay that rent you would also cease to own those lands, and they would be taken from you, as the lands have been taken from the owners in New Zealand and other countries that are under the same kind of government. And what you have to think of is this: Would you rather go on paying your rent to this Government under the Queen, or have your rent remitted by the New Zealand Government, and lose your lands?

9. I know what your answer is: You would rather pay your rent and keep your lands. Well, I will do what I can for you, by writing to Her Majesty the Queen, so that this country may not go to New Zealand, and that you may keep your lands. But when I tell you this I tell you also at the same time that you are all to keep very quiet, and to give no sort of trouble. If any of you were to give trouble, that would only make it easy for New Zealand to get your country, and for you to lose your lands. What there is to be said on your behalf I have already said to the Queen, and shall, if necessary, say it again. But, in the meanwhile, I repeat to you and I charge you all to remain quiet and peaceable, and to give no trouble either to white men or to any others, but to go about your own business and attend to your own affairs just as if you had never heard any question of New Zealand wanting to get this country. That is what you have got to do, and I, as your principal and head Chief, order you to do it.

10. And now, my friends, a word or two more about this Hospital. Hospitals have—I know not why—been sometimes called "the houses of death." This is very wrong. People may die in any kind of house, and they may sometimes die even in a hospital. But in a hospital such as this, many who would die in their own houses will be saved from death, and many who are sick will be made well. So this Hospital, and the other hospitals which are being built for the Fijians, will in future be known as "the houses of life." And I hope that all who may be sick in these provinces will freely come to this Hospital. They will find here a very clever and a very kind gentleman, Dr. Withington, who will do all he can to cure them, and they will always meet here with every possible kindness and good treatment. I have great pleasure now in declaring this Hospital open, and in expressing my assured conviction that it will be the means under Almighty God of much blessing to the people for whom it has been built.

The address, which was delivered in English and interpreted by the Hon. W. L. Allardyce, losing none of its force or effect in the translation, was received with much applause, and a short epistle was presented and read, thanking the Governor for water-supply, hospital, &c.

A vote of thanks, in the usual Native form, was passed, and His Excellency rose and invited those present to adjourn to the Hospital and partake of light refreshments, where in a few words the health of Dr. Withington, in whose charge the Hospital had been placed, was proposed by the Governor and drunk by those present. The Hospital buildings, which comprise three wards, dispensary, operating-room, and quarters for the resident doctor and native attendants, were then inspected, and the general opinion was that the site was well and centrally situated, and the buildings admirably suited for the treatment of the native sick, being large, well lighted, and ventilated, and bear more the appearance of a cheerful home than that of a hospital, the three wards opening out on to a broad verandah, which runs half round the main building. Before leaving again for Suva three ringing cheers were given for His Excellency.

Three ringing cheers for His Excellency terminated the proceedings, and the launch with the Governor and party on board pushed off from the wharf at Wainibokasi about 3 o'clock, arriving in Suva two hours later.

The band from the Roman Catholic Mission-station at Nailili was in attendance, and played several selections during the afternoon.

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