

Arikis and members of the District Council, and several Mataiapos and Rangatiras, and visited the Natives in their various villages—Ngatangia, Arorangi, and Avarua. Six white settlers formally called on me and made statements regarding the administration. I met several more casually, and engaged in conversation with them with reference to the management of Government affairs. The Reverend H. Bond James did not make any formal complaint, save that he thought that the law as to white men living with Maori women should be enforced. That law is as follows:—

“Any man or woman who shall within the limits of any village cohabit together without being married to each other to the scandal of the community shall be guilty of an offence against public morality, and each shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding £1, or, in default, twenty days’ hard labour. No proceedings shall be taken against any European for an offence under this section without the consent of a European Judge of the High Court of the Cook Islands or a European Resident Agent first obtained.”

Colonel Gudgeon and the present Commissioner have not given their consent to any criminal prosecutions. Mr. Reynolds stated that from his knowledge he thought that the Commissioners were right. It is to be observed that no charge is made by Dr. Dawson or Mr. Hosking against the Commissioner for not enforcing this law.

Before dealing with the complaints of the three named persons I desire to make some general observations.

(1.) *The Position of the Government in the Islands.*

There is a Federal Council or Parliament in the Group. This Council consists of the Arikis of all the islands save Niue, which has a separate government. Through lack of communication between the islands, and the great distance of the outlying islands from Rarotonga, no members from the distant islands have of late attended the Federal Council. The nearest island is Mangaia, which is 110 miles away. Aitutaki is 140 miles distant, while the islands in the north are several hundreds of miles away—Penrhyn is 740 miles—and communication with Rarotonga is difficult and only casual. The work of the Federal Council has practically been done by the members of the Federal Council who are resident in Rarotonga. There is, however, a Local Council in each island (see the Cook Islands Government Act, 1908, No. 28). The Local Council of Rarotonga meets frequently. The Local Council of Rarotonga has nine members, the chairman being the Commissioner. The other eight consist of the five Arikis and three elected members. This Council is practically the local Parliament and Executive Council of Rarotonga.

When the islands were ceded to Britain it was expressly declared by the people of each island, as a condition of such cession, that the island was to be annexed as part and parcel of the British Empire. The cession of Rarotonga was made on the 8th October, 1900, and was so proclaimed by the Governor, Lord Ranfurly. The Islands were not then annexed to New Zealand. They came to be part of New Zealand by virtue of an Order in Council of the 15th May, 1901, which extended the boundaries of New Zealand to include the Cook Islands. The Natives have not taken any exception to the inclusion of the island as part of New Zealand, as they have treated the Order in Council as made for Imperial purposes only. They would have resented, and they now resent, the idea that their local government has come to an end, and that they are held subject to the New Zealand Parliament. That this is their attitude can be judged by conferring with the Arikis, Mataiapos, and Rangatiras, and it also appears from a resolution passed by them on the 17th October, 1908, when Colonel Gudgeon was Commissioner. The resolution reads as follows, namely:—

“That the members of the Federal Council and of the Rarotonga Island Council whose names are subscribed hereto strongly object to any representation in the Parliament of New Zealand by means of a member for the Cook Islands, inasmuch as the Cook and Northern Islands are by the conditions of annexation a self-governing community under the British Crown, and since included in the Dominion of New Zealand for Imperial purposes only.”

If the Island Councils are not to have any power of management in the municipal or local concerns of the respective islands, it is obvious, that the proper thing to do would be to abolish all local government. If that were done, however, I expect there would be a very vigorous demand made by the people of the Islands for the severance of the Islands from the control of New Zealand.

The charges that were adduced by Mr. Wright are wholly about municipal matters, such as the management of the hospital, the question of drainage of a swamp, and the dismissal of a local officer. It has not hitherto been usual for the New Zealand Parliament to interfere in such matters. The management of city or county affairs has not, so far as I know, been inter-