

comparatively small matter to mention ; nevertheless we think that the person or persons who issue such notices should be compelled to sign them.

*Government Purchase of an Auxiliary Schooner.*

It is felt by the Administration that the purchase of an auxiliary schooner by the New Zealand Government, for use amongst the islands, would lead to a large development of trade, and would, moreover, enable a doctor to pay more regular visits to the outlying islands than he can at present. There is no doubt much in the contention, but we would point out that a schooner, the "Countess of Ranfurly," was once upon a time purchased ; but in the report of 1907 the following remarks were made on the subject by the Minister in Charge :—"The schooner 'Countess of Ranfurly' : The Government has decided to sell the schooner 'Countess of Ranfurly,' as she is running at an annual loss and does not meet the trade requirements of the islands. It was anticipated that the running of a vessel owned by the Government would prove more successful than the results have shown."

While not in any way condemning the purchase of a suitable vessel, we would point out that there are many difficulties in the way of running a schooner in the Cook Group : (1) Bananas brought in from the neighbouring islands to Rarotonga for transshipment to Auckland run serious risks, owing to delays and transshipment difficulties, of not reaching their destination in good order and condition, though oranges might be carried with less risk if they were first properly treated and dried before shipment ; (2) owing to there being no safe harbour in the lower group it is necessary during the hurricane season that all sailing-vessels must either go to Tahiti or to one of the islands of the upper group, seven hundred miles northward, and remain there for three months annually ; (3) there is a possibility of a Government-owned vessel being run on non-profitable lines or for political purposes ; (4) sailing-vessels at present in the hands of the traders do not pay directly, although they are of great indirect assistance to the owners ; (5) if the Administration owns an auxiliary schooner it must compete with the white traders for the carrying business.

On the other hand, we had evidence placed before us that at one of the outlying islands the best price per ton offered by traders to certain Natives for copra was £9 6s. 8d. in 1918, and £11 13s. 4d. in 1919. The price of copra in 1919 at Rarotonga was £25 per ton, while the cost of bringing it to Rarotonga by schooner should not have been more than, say, £2 per ton. Owing to the freighting difficulties the Natives referred to had no option but to accept the prices offered. This case may have been exceptional, but we had no reason to doubt the truth of the evidence referred to.

*Harbour-works.*

As Mr. Vickerman is especially reporting on this question it is unnecessary for us to touch on it, except to say that either the Administration should undertake the loading and discharging of vessels calling at Mangaia, and probably at other outlying islands, or regulate the prices charged by the Natives for doing the work.

We have considered the American system of "controlling" the copra trade in American Samoa, and have dealt at large with the idea in connection with Niue, where we think it might be tried, and have made certain recommendations in connection therewith. It is possible that the adoption of this or some other similar system would eventually be in the best interests of the Natives of Cook Islands, but we think circumstances hardly warrant its introduction there in the meantime.

*Mangaia.*—As matters are at present, traders are completely in the hands of the Natives, who raise their prices at a moment's notice. The charges per ton for loading and unloading vessels have gone up enormously during the past few years. The present price for bringing goods ashore from vessels at Mangaia is £3 per ton, and, according to the evidence adduced, certain traders have got notice that in future it will be raised to £5 per ton, a price out of all proportion to the services rendered.

*Aitutaki.*—An attempt should be made to introduce pearl-shell into the lagoon, which seems suitable for the purpose. If the attempt were successful a most valuable industry would be inaugurated. The trade in bêche-de-mer is worthy of further development.