

While in Suva we had the pleasure of meeting Messrs. Fell, Hedstrom, and Crompton, who had been appointed by the Governor of Fiji as a complementary Commission to confer with us on trade matters affecting Fiji and New Zealand. During the three days we spent in Suva we had conferences with those gentlemen, and we beg to hand you herewith a special confidential report on the various matters considered and discussed.

QUESTION (b): THE CONDITIONS OF TRADE BETWEEN NEW ZEALAND AND TONGA.

Tonga (Friendly Islands) comprises about one hundred inhabited islands, and many uninhabited coral banks on which a few coconut-palms are growing. They are situated about four hundred miles to the south-west of the Samoan Group, and about two hundred miles to the south-east of the Fijian Group. Tonga is the nearest archipelago to New Zealand, being only eleven hundred miles from Auckland. The islands are divided up into three main groups—Tongatabu, Haapai, and Vavau. They were discovered by Tasman in 1643, and were visited by that great navigator, Captain Cook, in 1775 and 1777.

The islands have a Native population of 22,689, and 350 Europeans. The influenza scourge a year and a half ago was responsible for the death of one thousand persons, but if epidemics can be avoided the population should slowly increase.

Tongatabu, in which the capital, Nukualofa, is situated, is a flat island of coral formation. The harbour has two entrances, both marked by surf-swept coral reefs. The passages are buoyed, but are narrow and tortuous; there is wharfage accommodation for vessels drawing up to 18 ft. The township of Nukualofa is well laid out, and possesses many grassy spaces, while its roads are bordered with bright flowering plants and shrubs. It is a land of many churches, most of which are built after the Native style of architecture, no nails being used in the construction; the services are famous for the fine singing of the Tongan choirs.

Practically the whole island is given over to coconut plantations, interspersed with banana, yam, and taro patches.

Lefuka, the chief island of the Haapai Group, is a repetition of Tongatabu on a smaller scale. It also is of coral formation, and is so narrow that a walk of ten minutes takes one from the west coast to the east. The "Port au Prince" was wrecked here in November, 1806. All the crew were massacred except one, William Marriner, who was taken by the King, Finau. He lived for some years amongst the Natives, learnt their language, and familiarized himself with their customs. On his return to England he supplied the material for a history of Tonga, which is now almost a classic.

There is no wharfage accommodation at Lefuka. Vessels anchor inside the reef about half a mile off shore. The depth of water is sufficient for vessels drawing up to 20 ft. Lighterage is done by the Government at 5s. per ton.

Vavau, the most northerly of the Tongan Group, is of volcanic origin, and of an entirely different formation. The harbour, which at its entrance is studded with islands, is of surpassing beauty, being perhaps the finest of any in the islands. It is of considerable extent and depth, and a large fleet of vessels could safely lie at anchor in all weathers. It has also immense possibilities as a naval base and a strategical point of vantage, so that in other hands than British it might become a menace to New Zealand and Australia. It has fair wharfage accommodation, and vessels can enter the port at any time of the day or night. At Nukualofa and Lefuka vessels only enter or leave in daylight.

The rise and fall of the tide in the Group is 4 ft. All inter-island trade is done by cutters and schooners owned and run by traders.

The Tongan Group is unique in many respects, and without a parallel in any part of the world. It is under constitutional government. It has a hereditary ruler, and a Parliament consisting of an equal number of nobles, or hereditary chiefs, and elected commoners. It is without poverty; every person possesses some land. There is no serious crime, and it has no national debt. Education and medical attention are free. To Shirley Baker, who died in New Zealand about eighteen years ago, Tonga owes much, although, as in the case of other reformers, his efforts were not fully appreciated at the moment, and eventually he was deported. The people