

OPENING OF PARLIAMENT.

Parliament House, Rarotonga, 1st August, 1900.

Present.—Lieut.-Colonel W. E. Gudgeon, British Resident; Makea, Ariki, Chief of the Federal Government; Tinomana, Ariki, Vice-Chief of the Federal Government; Karika, Ariki; Ngamaru, Ariki, Atiu, Mauke, and Mitiaro; Pa, Ariki, Takitumu; Mr. F. Goodwin, Clerk. Chief of the Government presiding.

Prayers.

Colonel Gudgeon welcomed the members in this the tenth session, on behalf of the Chief of the Government.

The Opening Address from the Chief of the Government was then read by Mr. F. Goodwin, Clerk to Parliament.

Speech of the Chief of the Federal Government to the Federal Parliament of the Cook Islands.

Greetings. It is my pleasant duty to inform you that your time during the present session will not be occupied by the consideration of legislative matter; there are, however, a few necessary additions or amendments required to the Acts passed during last session. These will require your attention, and there are several other matters of vital importance to the Federation which you will be invited to consider and deal with by resolution.

Foremost of these is the necessity which exists for regular communication with the outlying islands of this group. You are all aware that under the present conditions the Islands of Mauke, Mitiaro, Atiu, and Mangaia are rarely visited by any vessel, and for this reason the inhabitants are either unable to dispose of their produce, or, if they do succeed in selling their fruit, they do so at prices that are not remunerative. To remedy this very unsatisfactory state of affairs the Government proposes to purchase an auxiliary oil-engine schooner of about 100 tons register, the whole to cost about £2,500. If this proposal should be carried out it is our intention to reduce freights and fares to the lowest possible margin, in order that the producers may benefit by the change. The Government have felt themselves compelled to undertake this important operation inasmuch that a boat such as I have described would, in the hands of a private firm, create a monopoly, and therefore be contrary to your interests. You will, of course, understand that the Federal Government have not the money necessary to carry out this scheme, but His Excellency the Governor of New Zealand and the Premier of that colony both regard the proposal with great favour, and we have reason to believe that the latter will advance the money required at a moderate rate of interest—provided always that you affirm the necessity for such a vessel.

Another very important matter for your consideration is that of the Chili dollar. Last session you passed an Act which I have hesitated to bring into force, inasmuch as that statute did not provide any means whereby the trade of the group could be carried on after the Chili dollar had been abolished. This is a matter that requires to be dealt with most carefully. You have already affirmed that it is desirable, too, that British money should take the place of the dollar; it therefore lies with the Maori people to insist that their produce shall be paid for in British coin. You may, however, aid in this matter by a resolution calling on the people to refuse to accept the dollar in payment for coffee, copra, or limejuice; and you will be asked to pass a measure imposing an import duty of 10 per cent. on all Chili coin.

I desire also to direct your attention to another matter. From representations made by Captain Macbeth, of the Union Company, to the British Resident it would seem that the wharf and sheds built by his company were erected under a verbal promise from the late Resident that a lease of the site would be granted to the company. Now, the Government were never consulted on this subject; but there can be but little doubt that the promise was made, and that the company erected the wharf and sheds at considerable expense trusting in the *bona fides* of the promise. I do not, of course, admit that the late Resident had the power to make any promise of this nature unless authorised to do so by the Federal Government; but I think the Union Company ought not to suffer by reason of any mistake made by the late Resident. I therefore ask you to pass a resolution authorising me to grant a lease to the said company for a term not exceeding twenty years, making any conditions that you may think fit and reasonable, and which in your opinion should be included in the lease.

The visit of the Hon. R. J. Seddon, the Premier of New Zealand, has been of very great benefit to the people of the Cook Islands, in whom that gentleman takes more than a passing interest. An immediate result of this visit has been a convention by which money-orders will be exchanged between this Federation and the Colony of New Zealand—an arrangement which cannot fail to facilitate the business whether of the European merchants or of the Maori people, since it will place the latter in this position: that they will be in a position to insist that remittances made on behalf of fruit consigned to New Zealand shall in each case be paid by money-order. Mr. Seddon further proposes to assist the Federation by establishing a branch of the New Zealand Government Savings-Bank in Rarotonga. This will supply a want long felt, as it will supply a safe place of deposit for the surplus moneys of the community; and, as secrecy is an essential part of the New Zealand postal service, depositors need not fear that their affairs will become known to the public.

We have received other suggestions from the honourable gentleman which are valuable, and will be acted upon directly the funds of the Federation permit. I refer particularly to his offer to allow an engineer officer in the service of the New Zealand Government to superintend and direct the work of opening up boat-passages through the reefs which surround certain of the islands of this group. This is a very necessary work, and one that must be undertaken within the next few years.

A Bill will be laid before you for your consideration which will provide for an increase in the poll-tax upon Chinese immigrants, and which will assimilate the law of the Federation to that of New Zealand.