

to transmit to you, for the consideration of your Government, the accompanying copy of a letter from the Board of Trade, dated the 8th instant, enclosing a further despatch from Her Majesty's Consul at Noumea, together with a copy of the reply which has been sent to Mr. Layard by the Board of Trade.

I have, &c.,

M. E. HICKS BEACH.

Governor Sir Hercules Robinson, G.C.M.G., &c.

Enclosure 1 in No. 49.

The BOARD OF TRADE to the COLONIAL OFFICE.

Board of Trade, Marine Department,  
Whitehall Gardens, S.W., 8th April, 1879.

SIR,—

*Seamen Abroad.*

With reference to the letter from this department of the 19th September last, and previous correspondence relating to the practice at ports in Australia and New Zealand with regard to engagement and discharge of seamen, I am directed by the Board of Trade to transmit for the consideration of Sir Michael Hicks Beach the accompanying copy of a further despatch from Her Majesty's Consul at Noumea on the subject, together with a copy of one of its enclosures.

I am to request that you also bring under the notice of Sir Michael Hicks Beach the comments of this Board on Mr. Layard's despatch, which are written in red ink in the margin of the copy enclosed.

I am, at the same time, to enclose a copy of the reply which this Board have caused to be sent to Mr. Layard.

I am also to state that, although they expressed an opinion in the letter from this department of the 19th September last that the practice of issuing permits or licenses to ship does not seem to call for any observations from them, these practices assume so much more serious a character when taken in conjunction with the alleged habit of depriving seamen of their discharges that it would seem desirable that the whole matter should receive careful consideration.

The points noted by Mr. Layard with regard to the absence of a column in the agreements of some colonies for the balance of wages paid, and the alleged practice in Victoria and New South Wales and other colonies of allowing seamen to be engaged on board their ships without proper guarantees that the men understand fully the terms on which they are engaged, would also seem to require the careful attention of the authorities of the various colonies.

I have, &c.,

THOMAS GRAY.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Sub-Enclosure 1 to Enclosure 1 in No. 49.

The CONSUL at Noumea to the BOARD OF TRADE.

SIR,—

British Consulate, Noumea, 17th December, 1878.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt by this mail of your letter M/13,691, of the 19th September last, forwarding for such observations as I might have to make, the replies of the several Shipping-masters of Victoria (Melbourne), New South Wales (Sydney), and New Zealand (generally), through its Collector of Customs, to the representations I have deemed it my duty to make on certain practices in shipping British sailors, which I consider not in accordance with the British Merchant Seamen's Act.

2. My first observation is, that these gentlemen have confirmed everything I have advanced, putting their own construction on the Act, except the improper shipment of men—not before the Shipping-master. Here two out of the three colonies—New South Wales and New Zealand—are discreetly silent, Victoria cautiously obscure.

3. Victoria requests me to "particularize." I have less actual knowledge of Victoria than of either of the other colonies, few ships (I can only recall the "Loelia") coming hither from thence—I can only repeat what the sailors have told me; but it is admitted that permits are issued to seamen, in the absence of certificates of discharge, on payment of a fee of 5s. Where in the British Merchant Shipping Act is this practice sanctioned? I repeat, it is contrary to its provisions, and against the liberty of a British subject.

[The Consul forgets that the British Merchant Shipping Act does not regulate the arrangements for the engagement of seamen in a colony on board ships belonging to that colony.]

4. I cannot particularize any instance in Victoria in which a sailor has signed articles on board, and not before the Shipping-master. I can only say sailors have told me that they have done so repeatedly, that it is a common practice in all the colonies, and that the agreement-sheet, when full, is taken by the captain to the Shipping-master, and signed by him in the lump, without ever reading it over to, or even in the presence of, the seamen. Had this not been the course