

1901.

NEW ZEALAND.

# THE POSITION IN FIJI:

BEING AN INTERVIEW WITH REV. MR. SLADE, WESLEYAN MISSIONARY, FIJI, PUBLISHED IN  
THE AUCKLAND EVENING STAR OF THE 23RD JULY, 1901.

*Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Leave.*

THE Rev. Mr. Slade, the well-known Wesleyan missionary at Fiji, arrived in Auckland by the s.s. "Fiona" last night, on a brief holiday visit. Mr. Slade's name has been before the public lately owing to the action of Sir George O'Brien, Governor of Fiji, who endeavoured to secure his removal from the group. Interviewed by a representative of the *Star* at Devonport, this morning, Mr. Slade gave his views on the Fijian Government system. In reply to a question, Mr. Slade said that the trouble between himself and the Governor had arisen over a letter published in the *Fiji Times*, and reprinted in the *Review of Reviews*, in which he advocated the federation of Fiji with New Zealand. This greatly angered Sir George O'Brien, and he accused Mr. Slade of carrying out an agitation among the natives, with federation as its object, and a lot of so-called evidence of this was forwarded to the Missionary Society, with a request for Mr. Slade's removal, stating that the Governor did not wish to deport him, owing to the office he held. The Missionary Society, as there was no evidence to justify it, refused the Governor's request, and the matter ended in its withdrawal.

How about the present position in Fiji?—Well, I suppose you have seen that last Ordinance with reference to those attempting to induce Fijians to take any action having for its object the alteration of the present form of Government. That Ordinance has met with much disapproval, and there is a strong feeling that it should not be allowed at Home. It was sprung as a surprise on the Council, being passed in less than three-quarters of an hour. The Governor spoke very strongly on the matter, and made out that he had information that made such an Ordinance imperative. He thus frightened some of the members, and the Ordinance was opposed by but one member, Mr. Burton.

His Excellency seems to be something of an autocrat?—Yes; the Government is entirely an autocracy; but under no Governor, in my experience, has this autocracy been so severely felt as under the present administrator. Sir George O'Brien is a very able man in such matters as the building of roads, bridges, &c., but in the higher portions of a Governor's work, such as the knowledge of the natives, their condition, and their requirements, he is very much at fault. This is due to the fact that he has never gone about the country, but has acquired all information by minutes from heads of departments. He is almost unknown to the Europeans at Fiji, and has never had conversations with any one outside the Government to find out what the natives are like. He speaks of the Fijians as an excitable race; while, as a matter of fact, there never was a more phlegmatic people. The general feeling in Fiji is that the Ordinance already referred to was aimed at one man, Mr. Humphrey Berkeley, whom the Governor professes to consider a very dangerous man. I do not think he has sufficient influence to cause trouble, even if he desired it. The missionaries have the strongest influence among the natives, and, of course, that influence is wholly on the side of peace. Fiji was ceded to Britain mainly as a result of missionary influence, and it cannot be doubted that the missionaries are still loyal, so that any suggestion of their stirring up strife would be absurd.

Has Sir George left the group yet? He was to leave on Thursday, the day after my departure. He has now been in the group four years, and the custom is that the fifth year is taken as leave of absence, so that it is improbable that he will return. He is absolutely tactless, and has never endeavoured to find out by personal experience the feelings of the people he governed. The Magistrates of the various districts do much of the administrative work, and the Government has recently appointed Native Inspectors, who report to the Governor. I have seen some of the diaries of these Inspectors, and certainly some very odd writing has been done in them. The Governor is a man readily influenced by panic, and probably the Ordinance may have been caused by something submitted by an Inspector.

Sir George opposes the federation of Fiji with either Australia or New Zealand?—Yes, he appears to make a personal matter of it. I have taken an interest in the matter because I

feel that the natives are not being fairly treated by the Government, and that any change would give them a better chance.

What are the desires of the Europeans in regard to Government?—I feel that Sir George has misrepresented the Fiji character altogether. We missionaries have heard of no rising, which is hinted at in the Ordinance, nor are the people likely to think of rising. For one thing, they are held too tight; and for another, they have no organization among the various tribes.

I gather that you do not approve of the Fiji Government system?—I object to it *in toto*. My great reason for favouring federation is with a view of getting done with the communal system. As the people progress this system would gradually die; but the Government is afraid to let it lapse, and accordingly the hold of the Government is made stronger by Ordinances. A Fijian belongs almost entirely to the commune. From the age of sixteen he is taken from his father's control, and he cannot leave the village without permission, while for absenting himself for a few days he can be, and frequently is, imprisoned for six months. His home and its manner of building is determined by the officials, who are on top of each other's heads all over the islands, and lately the Inspectors have gone so far as to range the boys and girls of a village in lines, and call on them to choose their wives and husbands, the natives being afraid to refuse. Permission has been refused to youths over sixteen to attend school, simply because they were wanted in the commune. Thus the village is practically the world of its inhabitants, and freedom amongst the natives is an unknown quantity.

And what is the effect of this on the native character?—It not only affects their character, but also their lives. All are reduced to an absolutely dead level, and ambition is killed, and, with it, frequently even the desire to live. The Indians and Polynesians are allowed to lease land wherever they desire to do so, and to move at will, but not so the Fijians. In the four provinces wherein I laboured from the 1st January to the 30th June, there was a loss to population of 243 by excess of deaths over births. This I attribute largely in the case of adults to the loss of desire to live, through there being no goal for their ambition. The infant mortality is very high among the Fijians, though the villages are well drained and supplied with water. In the coolie villages, where sanitation is unknown, the streets swarm with chubby happy children. It is thought that they should have the power to elect a representative Council, and a petition with this object is now going the rounds. At present the Council is composed of Government officials, who vote as directed, and nominees of the Governor, who are in so hopeless a minority that I wonder they retain their seats. Regarding federation, it is generally thought that Fiji should federate with Australia, and, in my opinion, any attempt to federate with New Zealand would be blocked by Australia. Of course, as with Queensland, we have the black labour question, white workers being an impossibility in the sugar plantations. There is another matter, continued Mr. Slade, to which reference might be made. Practically, the whole of Fiji's import trade comes from Australia. Sydney merchants cater very carefully for our market, and supply such goods as cottons and hardware at 100 per cent. less than we can get them from Auckland. This seems unaccountable in view of the drawback on the re-exported goods.

*Approximate Cost of Paper.*—Preparation, not given; printing (1,375 copies), £1 6s. 6d.

By Authority: JOHN MACKAY, Government Printer, Wellington.—1901.

Price 3d.]