

REPORT

COOK ISLANDS (EXCEPT NIEUE)

PART I.—GENERAL INFORMATION

1. GEOGRAPHY

THE Cook Group (excluding Niue) comprises fifteen islands of a total land area of approximately 100 square miles, scattered over some 850,000 square miles of ocean extending from 9 degrees south to almost 23 degrees south and from 156 degrees west to 167 degrees west.

Niue Island is within the boundaries of the Cook Group, but because of its geographical position has been administered separately since 1903 and is specially referred to in the latter part of this report.

The Cook Islands other than Niue fall naturally into two Groups—the Southern or Lower Group, and the Northern Group. The Lower Group consists of eight islands, of which Rarotonga, Aitutaki, Atiu, Mitiaro, Mauke, and Mangaia are inhabited and produce citrus fruit, copra, and other products. Of the remaining Lower Group islands, Takutea is uninhabited but produces copra, while Manuae is privately leased and is worked as a copra plantation.

The Northern Group islands, of which Penrhyn and Manihiki are the most important, include also Rakahanga, Pukapuka, and Palmerston, which are inhabited, and Suwarrow and Nassau, which are normally uninhabited. All are low-lying coral atolls with little if any soil and the main produce is copra. Pearl-shell is obtained in fair quantity from the lagoons at Penrhyn and Manihiki.

The whole Group lies within the hurricane belt and a number of destructive storms has been experienced in the hurricane seasons, which extend from January to March. Considerable damage to buildings and plantations was caused by such storms in February, 1935, March, 1943, and January, 1946. There were no serious storms in 1947 or in the hurricane season just ended. The whole of the area of the Cook Islands is covered by a meteorological service with headquarters in Fiji and advance warning of the intensity and path of tropical storms is now available and enables precautions to be taken to protect life and property. Apart from the summer months, when it is usually hot and humid, the climate in the Lower Group islands is mild and equable. The average temperature in Rarotonga for the last thirty-seven years was 74.7° F., and the average annual rainfall for the same period was 83.8 in.

Rarotonga, the seat of Administration of the Cook Islands, is 1,633 nautical miles from Auckland. The centre of the island consists of a number of high hills of a rocky and rugged nature. There are numerous creeks and streams with fertile valleys and flat lowlands. A reticulation system supplies water to all villages. The other islands of the Group, both Southern and Northern, suffer from a lack of streams and wells and are mostly dependent on rain-water stored in tanks. Although new tanks are being built as far as the availability of materials and other circumstances permit, additional water-storage capacity is still required throughout the Group.

At 31st March, 1948, the Native population of the Group was estimated at 14,145. With the addition of 4,289 in Niue, the total Native population of the Cook Islands was 18,434. The European populations were 311 and 29 respectively, giving a grand total of 18,774.