

AITUTAKI.

Early on the morning of Friday, the 1st May, the Island of Aitutaki was sighted, and about 8.30 a.m. the "Mapourika" anchored outside the Avatapu Channel, opposite the principal Village of Orongo, on the western side of the island. Mr. J. T. Large, the Resident Agent, came off to the steamer, and accompanied the Minister and party to the shore. Aitutaki combines the features of the volcanic island and the atoll; indeed, it may be regarded as an atoll in course of formation, and it affords a good illustration of the different stages of the process. The island is almost surrounded by a barrier reef, which supports several fruitful islets, and on the south-east lies five miles distant from the land. On the western side it approaches much nearer, the entrance to the channel mentioned above being about a mile from the wharf. At the northern point of the island the reef fringes the shore as in the other main islands of the Cook Group, the barrier stage having not yet been reached. This island approaches more closely to Rarotonga in the general appearance of fertility than any of the others, and it can also claim to possess a considerable degree of scenic attractiveness. It rises somewhat abruptly on the western side to a height of 360 ft., and slopes away gradually to the eastern coast. The area is about seven square miles. The population at present is twelve hundred, two-thirds of these living in the four settlements on the western side, and the remainder in the Villages of Vaipae and Tautu on the east. The wharf at Orongo is a very serviceable structure of considerable length built of loose blocks of stone, and reflects much credit on the Resident Agent, to whose ability and energy the work is due. He reports, however, that to make it secure against damage from the heavy seas that roll in from the westward during the hurricane months it will be necessary to build it up with stone set in concrete to a further height of 3 ft. The lagoon on this side of the island is shallow, and can only be used by vessels of a very small class; but Mr. Large states that on the eastern side the lagoon is much deeper, and freer from coral patches, and that there are several places in the reef where, it is believed, a navigable channel might be formed. The land at Aitutaki is divided among the people in small sections, and when the Land Titles Court has completed its work the question of tenure will be satisfactorily settled, so far, at least, as the rights of the Natives are concerned. There are four Arikis on Aitutaki—Vaeruarangi, Tamatoa, Te Urukuru, and Manarangi, the last-named being a woman. The following is a report of a conference with the Natives held in the Courthouse at Orongo during the morning. Mr. J. T. Large, the Resident Agent, who interpreted, explained that the reason there were not more Natives present was that the steamer had arrived unexpectedly, and the majority of the Natives, being away in the interior, had not heard of her arrival.

Hon. Mr. Mills: Friends, salutations and greetings to you all. The Premier desired me to remember him to you, and to say that he regretted very much he could not accompany us on this trip. He hopes, however, to be able to pay you a visit with the Governor early next year. We are all very pleased to be with you to-day. You will understand that until the islands became annexed to New Zealand we had very little chance—that is, collectively—of knowing much of your customs and ways of living; in fact, we were short of a great deal of necessary information, and that is the principal reason why I and my friends are here with you now. On our return we shall be able to tell the Parliament what we have seen, and what we think of the various islands we have visited up to the present. We have every faith in the Resident Commissioner, Colonel Gudgeon, and Mr. Large, our Resident Agent, and those who represent the Government; but it is really impossible to administer these islands without first getting what we call bed-rock information, and being able to see you all and those who administer your laws. We hope, on our return, to have some changes for the better made—that is, by endeavouring to get closer communication, and also by getting more produce from the islands in order to satisfy the wants of New Zealand. I have told our friends at Rarotonga, Mauke, and Mangaia that we are now importing every year a very large quantity of tropical fruit into New Zealand. As Minister of Customs, I instructed the Secretary to prepare a return for me showing what quantity of tropical fruit we imported into the colony last year, and find that there were no less than 560,000 parcels of fruit imported into New Zealand last year, and out of that large quantity we only received 57,000 from the Cook Islands. So you will see what large room there is for you to improve the development of these islands, and thus produce and export a good deal more than you do. It has been represented to me on some of the islands that it would be advisable to impose a duty on some of the fruits that are brought in from Australia, Fiji, or Tahiti, and when I return I shall submit the proposals made to me to the Premier and the Cabinet, and the matter will then be discussed by the Ministers; but you will readily understand that it is a question of State policy whether we impose these duties or not. But you may rest assured that whatever is done will be done in the best interests of these islands. As you are now connected with New Zealand, and as you have now become a part of the British dominions, and are administered from New Zealand, the Government recognise that there is a very serious responsibility cast upon them to see that everything possible is done to further the interests of these islands, and that facilities are afforded for a better interchange of commerce with New Zealand. Any information that any of the Arikis or others here wish to forward to New Zealand can be sent at any time through your Resident Agent to Colonel Gudgeon, the Commissioner, and it will reach me in due time by the mail, and it will always receive the consideration it merits. Speaking for my party, I can assure you that we, one and all, realise that these islands possess very great producing qualities, much better than we anticipated, and we hope that all the islands will be steadily developed, and more speedily than they have been during the past few years. We have been received so kindly and cordially by the Natives in all the islands that we shall carry away very warm recollections of the kindness extended to every one of the party. Should any of you wish to communicate anything to me during my stay here, I shall be very pleased to hear it; but we leave to-night at 6 o'clock and go on to Tahiti, and it is impossible to remain as long among you as we would wish. Some of my friends are very anxious for the Natives