

MEMORANDUM BY THE MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE COOK AND OTHER ISLANDS ADMINISTRATION.

The subjects dealt with in the foregoing report being in many cases common to all the islands, the report of the proceedings might have been condensed somewhat; but, seeing that the people of each island have to a large extent an individuality of their own, I have thought it advisable to meet what I know to be the wishes of the Arikis by placing on record a report of the proceedings of each meeting. Visiting members of the Legislature were present at most of the meetings, and in some cases took part in the discussion.

Owing to the extended nature of the itinerary, embracing as it did a stoppage at fifteen different places—viz., Rarotonga, Mangaia, Mauke, Atiu, Aitutaki, Papeete, Penrhyn, Manihiki, Tutuila, Apia, Niue, Vavau, Nukualofa, Suva, and Levuka—the time spent at each of our own islands was necessarily limited, and was found to be barely sufficient for a full discussion of the matters the Natives and the Resident Agents had to bring before me. Notwithstanding this, much information was obtained that will be invaluable in connection with the future administration of the islands and in discussions in the House.

The principal matters brought before me by the Natives were:—

Rarotonga—

- Hotel or accommodation-house.
- Government schools.
- Encouragement of fruit trade.

Mangaia—

- Grant of £500 for road.
- Publication of accounts.

Aitutaki—

- Grant for improving wharf.
- Agents for fruit in Auckland and Wellington.

Niue—

- Direct communication with New Zealand.
- Total prohibition of alcoholic liquors.
- Modification of duty on tobacco.
- Abolition of duty on Natives' luggage.
- Abolition of duty on horses from Tonga.
- Traders' licenses.
- Labour licenses.
- Prohibition of sale of land.
- Emigration fees.
- Paper money.
- Payment for labour.
- Duty on material used for the purposes of the mission.

The Natives' views on these matters will be found in the reports of the proceedings.

The Land.

The area of the sixteen islands within the colony's extended boundaries is about 235 square miles, a great portion of which is rich volcanic land capable of producing large quantities of coconuts, oranges, bananas, pine-apples, limes, and other tropical fruits, as well as coffee, &c. In addition to this, tobacco grows well at Mangaia. In the present undeveloped state of the islands it is really impossible to say what their capabilities are; but if only half the area is rich volcanic soil, and if one imagines a vast greenhouse or conservatory of 118 square miles in extent, one gets an idea of the enormous quantities of fruit that can be grown in that tropical climate. When the surveys now in progress at Rarotonga are complete, if enterprising colonials will open up new plantations, I am satisfied that sufficient tropical fruits will soon afterwards be grown to supply all our requirements. While at Rarotonga I was told that suitable sections of 50 acres, and more, could be leased there for terms extending to sixty years at from 4s. to 10s. per acre per annum, according to quality. Though it takes from eight to ten years for a coconut-palm to come into full bearing, banana-plants, which may be grown among the maturing palms, commence giving handsome recurring crops when they are a year old.

Look where one will, the rich, expansive foliage gives one the impression that Nature seems never to get tired in that tropical region. For nine months of the year the heat of the islands is not oppressive, and European residents speak very highly of the climate.

The Natives.

According to the last census the population of the whole Group was 12,292, the number of Europeans being very small. The Natives of both sexes are a well-developed, generous-hearted people. Moreover, their intellectual and physical capacity is equal, if not superior, to that of most aboriginal races. They should be taught to work their plantations on a proper system, for there can be no doubt that under European guidance they would show much better returns from their lands. In those islands, however, where Nature has bountifully provided nearly every necessary of life, it is difficult to instil into the minds of the Natives the advantages to be derived from a systematic cultivation of the soil or the need for working between meals. It is a singular but notable fact that Natives who show no inclination to work while at home become in many cases reliable and competent workmen when they remove to another island in the Group or to Tonga or Tahiti.

The Federal Council has very wisely taken steps, by passing "The Asiatics Immigration Restriction Act, 1900," to prevent the settlement of Chinese in the islands. The evils resulting from the influx of Chinese and other Asiatics into other islands of the Pacific are well known.