

COOK ISLANDS.

REPORT OF RESIDENT COMMISSIONER.

SIR,

Cook Islands Administration, Rarotonga, 11th May, 1916.

I have the honour to submit my report for the year ended the 31st March, 1916.

FINANCE.

We began the year with a credit balance of £3,092. The revenue was £7,672—a decrease of £2,445 on the revenue of the previous year. The deficiency is attributable chiefly to the severe drought of last season, when the rainfall registered 47 in.—only half the average yearly fall. We are making up for it now. For the first quarter of this year the fall has been 63 in. As a result the fruit crops are now very promising.

Another contributory cause of our falling revenue is the deficient means of communication between the Group and New Zealand. The monthly cargo boat from Auckland has become increasingly unreliable. As we are not on any cable line, and have no wireless station, the failure of a steamer to keep her time-table date always results in loss to our people, for there is no means of warning them that the vessel is not running to time. We have just had a regrettable experience of this. The “Flora” was due at Rarotonga to ship cargo for Auckland on the 27th April. Unfortunately she broke down on her way to Tahiti. Quite unconscious of this the planters at Rarotonga, Native and European, proceeded to pick their fruit. They accumulated over six thousand cases of oranges and bananas on the wharf to await the “Flora’s” arrival. The fruit lay there from the 20th April to the 5th May, and it was not until the latter date that news was brought by the “Moana” of the “Flora’s” breakdown, and that there would be no steamer available to take the fruit to New Zealand. This large shipment was in consequence entirely lost; and the planters and traders have suffered heavy financial loss in consequence. The only means of avoiding these risks is to have a wireless station on the island; and until we have it our only industry, and the Administration generally, are heavily handicapped.

To return to our finances: Out of our revenue of £7,673 and the cash balance from the previous year of £3,092—a total of £10,765—we expended £9,080. The New Zealand Government, it may be added, assisted us by paying salaries previously paid by the Administration to the amount of £960.

The Treasurer, Mr. W. J. Stevenson, points out in his interesting report (attached hereto) that we must raise additional revenue. This is undoubtedly necessary. Under the Cook Islands Act, 1915, new and serious responsibilities have been placed upon the Administration. Our share of the cost of setting up a suitable educational system throughout the Group must prove expensive.

We have taken over the maintenance and construction of roads and bridges (formerly carried out by the Natives under a *corvée* system) estimated to cost us £600 a year.

PUBLIC HEALTH.

The report of the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. G. Pearce Baldwin, is also attached. The doctor states that the health of Rarotonga has improved. The Resident Agent at Atiu reports that the health of the people there is excellent. There is a report to the same effect from the Resident Agent at Mauke. No reports are available from the other islands. The three islands upon which there are small leper colonies are Penrhyn, Rakahanga, and Manihiki. They are situated in the far north. The nearest of these, Manihiki, is 650 miles from Rarotonga. No fruit is exported from these islands nor from Motu-rakau, where there are four lepers. Owing to the scarcity of medical men, occasioned by the war, it has been found impossible to secure the services of a doctor for work on the outer islands.

FRUITGROWING.

This is the chief industry of the Group; and a very valuable one it can be made. It requires cheaper and better transport, and improved means of communication. The attached reports of Mr. E. A. Reid, Officer in Charge of the Agricultural Department, shows the valuable work that has been done by this Department during the year.

It is satisfactory to note that Native planters now begin to realize the necessity of the cultivation of their lands. The Department has been able to a limited extent to help the poorer Native growers by allowing them the use of a plough and team. Next season more will be done in this direction. As soon as Mr. Reid’s experiments determine the most suitable fertilizer for their lands, a scheme will be prepared for supplying it to the planters who require help—on easy terms of payment—subject, of course, to proper safeguards against loss by the Administration. By this means it is expected that considerable areas of apparently exhausted land will be brought back to cultivation.

PUBLIC WORKS.

These have been at a standstill because of our falling revenue.

HIGH COURT AND NATIVE LAND COURT.

The accompanying reports of the Registrar of the High Court, Mr. H. H. G. Ralfe, require no comment. Mr. Ralfe is unfortunately severing his connection with the Administration to take up his former position of Clerk of Court at Auckland. He has proved a most valuable officer, and it will be very difficult to replace him.