

QUESTION (d): THE CONDITIONS OF TRADE BETWEEN NEW ZEALAND AND THE COOK ISLANDS.

COOK ISLANDS.

The Group is called after the great explorer who discovered nearly all these islands. Although he was told of its existence by the Natives of Aitutaki, he failed to find Rarotonga, probably on account of the prevalence of cloud or fog which often surrounds it.

The British flag was first hoisted at Rarotonga in 1888 by Rear-Admiral Edmund Burke, of H.M.S. "Hyacinth," who received instructions to take possession when his ship was lying at anchor at Honolulu.

In 1900 the Group was taken over by New Zealand, and in 1901 it was included in the boundaries of New Zealand.

The Cook Islands may be conveniently divided into two groups—the lower and the upper.

Rarotonga, the principal island and the seat of Government, is the centre of the lower group, which comprises also Aitutaki, Atiu, Mauke, Mitiaro, and Mangaia, spread out in a semicircle to the east and within a radius of 150 miles from Rarotonga.

The lower group comprises all the fruit islands, every one of them being of volcanic origin and of great fertility. Coconuts, oranges, bananas, pineapples, lemons, limes, mangoes, tobacco, coffee, and many other tropical fruits and products flourish.

The upper group is entirely composed of sandy atolls, the highest not more than 10 ft. above sea-level, and all kept secure from the ordinary ravages of the sea by barrier reefs which surround them. A luxuriant growth of coconut-palms is the only vegetation. The lower group produces fruit and copra, the upper group copra and pearl-shell.

The upper group has for its most northerly outpost Penrhyn, lying close up to the Line and 700 miles north of Rarotonga. Then come Manihiki, Rakahanga, Pukapuka (or Danger Island), a little further south, and finally Palmerston Island, about 212 miles north of Rarotonga.

The Cook Islands stretch, then, from Mangaia in the south to Penrhyn in the north, a distance, roughly, of 1,000 miles.

There are pearl-fisheries at Penrhyn and Manihiki, which, with further development and strictly administered regulations in regard to close seasons, have much potential value. We understand that regulations in this direction have recently been made.

Rarotonga is the largest island of the Group, and has a population of 3,000 Natives and 160 Europeans, and an area of about 16,500 acres.

By common consent it is esteemed the gem of the Group. Its mountain peaks, rising from an encircling belt of coconut-palms and clad to their summits in dense tropical verdure, give it a grandeur and beauty not to be found in any of its sister islands. Its climate during the hurricane season, which extends from December to March, is hot and steamy, but for the rest of the year it is particularly pleasant. The rainfall is 80 in. to 90 in. per annum, of which two-thirds fall in the rainy or hurricane season.

Aitutaki is next in importance, with an area of about 4,000 acres of fertile tropical land, and a population of 1,294 Natives and six Europeans. It grows all tropical fruits to perfection.

Mangaia—considered to have one of the best climates in the Pacific, with a population of 1,241 Natives and six whites—has a rather remarkable feature: A wall of dead coral—the Makatea—thrust up to a great height, and 100 yards wide, makes a deep basin of the interior of the island. On the Makatea all citrus fruits grow abundantly. In the basin the taro plantations are a great feature, and the coconut is found everywhere. Unfortunately, in January last a hurricane visited the island and destroyed the lower belt of coconut-palms on the north side, besides doing considerable damage to banana and orange groves. As a consequence the output of copra was considerably interfered with, but at the time of our visit the island was recovering, and should in a short period regain its normal productiveness.