

SHIPPING FACILITIES.

Both imports and exports show that our shipping facilities were worse last year than they were in 1918, but it is gratifying to be able to report an improvement in this respect this year. The "Talune," a larger and better vessel, has replaced the "Flora" on the Auckland run. She is already proving of great advantage in getting the orange crop away. Thanks to her large carrying-capacity we have already passed last year's total export of oranges (70,000 cases), although the season is little more than half over.

The "Talune," however, lands all her fruit at Auckland; and, as the Fiji fruit is also shipped to that port, the market there becomes glutted, and prices fall. On the other hand, the Wellington and the southern markets are often bare; but our planters cannot reach them to any satisfactory extent, as the mail-boats that make Wellington their destination have very little space available for island fruit. It is suggested, in the interests of the planters, that a very valuable alteration in the itinerary of the "Talune" would be effected by making Auckland and Wellington alternately her destination. In that way our island fruit would be more evenly distributed, to the mutual advantage of the growers and of the people of the Dominion.

ALLOTMENT OF SPACE.

A new method of allotting fruit-space at Rarotonga on the New Zealand boats is just now the cause of much dissatisfaction amongst the Natives. Half the available space is reserved for the five fruit-dealing firms and the European settlers, some fifteen in number; the other half is divided amongst the six hundred to seven hundred Native planters, who produce seven-eighths of the fruit exported. As their freight is guaranteed they cannot understand a system that places them at such a disadvantage.

PACKING-SHEDS.

A series of interesting experiments is now being made by the Fruit Department (Mr. E. A. Reid, Officer in Charge) in the packing of oranges. The most valuable discovery so far is that by picking the fruit at least six days before it is packed it is possible to detect and discard fruit infected by the fruit-fly. It has further been demonstrated that, instead of one large central packing-shed at Avarua, it will be necessary to have a shed for each district. That will mean seven or eight for the whole island. When it is demonstrated that these improved methods eliminate the danger of fly-infected fruit reaching New Zealand from these islands, the rigid inspection of our fruit at present insisted upon in the New Zealand ports will become unnecessary and will no doubt cease. This will mean a great saving in time and labour in getting the fruit from the ship to the warehouse.

TOBACCO AND CHILLIES.

Encouraged by the high price of tobacco, and with the help of the New Zealand Tobacco Company (of Napier), which has generously supplied seed, a trial is being given to the cultivation of tobacco for commercial purposes in Rarotonga. A chemical analysis of soil from various parts of the island proved that much of it is well adapted for this purpose, and the result is awaited with a great deal of interest.

A useful experiment by Mr. Reid at the Pua-au Nursery has shown that chillies can be grown and supplied to the New Zealand market with success.

POST AND TELEGRAPH DEPARTMENT.

The work of the Post Office has so increased that it was found necessary to separate the positions of Treasurer and Postmaster. Mr. H. G. Stainton, an experienced New Zealand Postal officer, has been appointed Postmaster. Mr. W. J. Stevenson, who has satisfactorily borne the burden of all three offices for many years, will now be enabled to devote all his time to the important duties of the Customs Department and the Treasury.

The wireless station continues to prove itself a great boon to the Group, and especially to the business portion of the community. The problem of establishing substations at Aitutaki and Mangaia is not yet solved.

Recent developments afford the hope that the wireless telephone will prove the best means of communication between Rarotonga and the other islands.

The telephone system installed in Rarotonga is being extended practically round the island.

A very serious drawback to the work of the Administration is the entire lack of anything like regular communication between the islands of the Group. This disadvantage is felt by all our Departments, but especially by the Medical Officers. In the past the London Missionary Society—to whom we are so greatly indebted in many ways—carried our officials round the Group every year on its steamer the "John Williams." Unfortunately, that vessel has now been withdrawn, and our officers must depend for transportation upon the casual trips of two trading schooners. The result is that many islands cannot be reached. It is quite clear that the only remedy is for the Administration to have its own vessel.

PUBLIC WORKS.

Atiu: Early in the year we were fortunately able to obtain supplies of material that enabled our Engineer (Mr. H. M. Connal) to carry out the works for the improvement of the water-supply of Atiu. At the same time a great improvement was effected by the construction of a new road to the beach, and the blasting of a new entrance to this road from the reef through the cliff.

At Avarua a permanent addition to the Government buildings has been built to provide new offices for the Treasurer. The following public works were stopped owing to our inability to obtain timber or cement from New Zealand: Waterworks improvement, hospital alterations, and