

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

BEETLE-DESTRUCTION.

The work of suppressing the rhinoceros-beetle (*Oryctes nasicornis*) has been steadily maintained throughout the year. In last year's report the opinion was expressed that this destructive pest was fairly held in Upolu, and that provided no relaxation took place in the control measures employed no fear need be entertained as to the future. Since then a series of inspections covering the whole of the plantations in Upolu confirms the assurance given a year ago. The coconut-trees are healthy and prolific in bearing, and there are very large areas where there are no noticeable signs of the beetle. Some of these areas two or three years ago were so widely ravaged by the beetle that a complete extermination of the coconut-palms seemed possible. This applies to considerable areas in the Lefaga, Safata, Falealili, Lepa, and Lotofaga districts, in all of which new planting by the Natives has recently been taking place. The fact that the Natives have started replanting is evidence of the progress made by the Department in grappling with the beetle pest. The districts cited as showing most marked improvement are situated on the south coast of the island. It would appear that the beetle thrives better, or has a better chance of survival, on the north side, where the rainfall is lighter. Nevertheless, the district of Fagaloa, situated on the north coast, is among the cleanest in Upolu. Sporadic outbreaks of the beetle are, of course, continually occurring, but investigation of their cause invariably reveals neglect in keeping the plantations clean of decaying logs and vegetable refuse. It is safe to predict that if the cultivations are kept clean, coupled with the continued searching operations, the menace of the beetle will steadily diminish.

Beetle Ordinance, 1921.—Two important innovations were introduced into the new Beetle Ordinance which came into force at the beginning of the year. Hitherto the Natives were required to search for beetles throughout Monday forenoon of every week. The enforcement of a specified time for searching was found in practice to operate hardly upon the Samoans; consequently a regulation was embodied in the new Ordinance to permit them to search at their own convenience. A weekly quota is fixed for all villages, and every able-bodied male Native is required to find beetles, larvæ, and eggs to a number specified for his village, and to deliver the beetles, &c., so collected to the Pulenuu every Saturday at noon. This new regulation is greatly appreciated by the Samoans. Since the quotas were fixed a year ago it has been found necessary in several cases to reduce the number owing to the difficulty of finding beetles. These reductions in the quotas are made on the advice of the Pulefaatoagas, supported by the European Inspector.

The Pulefaatoagas.—The appointment of Pulefaatoagas (Native Plantation Inspectors) in connection with the new Ordinance has been a gratifying success. These officials (ten in number) make quarterly inspections of the Native cultivations within their respective jurisdictions, and after each inspection report to the Director. They issue instructions for the cleaning-up of lands, and exercise a general supervision over the Pulenuu. These Pulefaatoagas have already given evidence of their capabilities, and there is every reason for believing that, with the help and advice of the European Inspectors, they will develop into efficient, self-reliant officers, with a full sense of the responsibilities of their office.

LAND-CLEANING COMPETITION.

A land-cleaning competition was held during the year, and proved highly satisfactory, being the means of cleaning up approximately 12,760 acres of Native land.

REPLANTING AND FOOD RESOURCES.

The work of replanting the plantations, which was suspended on account of the beetle's ravages, is being carried out successfully. As an illustration of the progress made it may be mentioned that in the Lefaga and Safata districts alone, within the three months December–February last, approximately 8,500 coconuts were planted. Replanting on a similar scale is being done throughout the island. Formerly, through want of foresight or other causes, the Samoans occasionally ran short of food, and applications for assistance were usually made to the Government. No necessity for such applications has arisen within the last two years. The Department of Agriculture, acting through the Pulefaatoagas, has assisted in bringing about this desirable state of affairs by inducing the Samoans to exercise foresight and care in providing for sufficient food-supplies. Orders for planting are regularly issued by the Pulefaatoagas, who act largely on the recommendations of the visiting European Inspector from this Department. In addition to the coconuts already referred to, there have been planted in the Lefaga and Safata districts since December last large numbers of taros, bananas, tobacco-plants, and sugar-cane. "There are," writes the Inspector for those districts, "on an average about twenty-five men in each village, and each one has to plant twenty-five palm-nuts, three hundred taros, fifty bananas, twenty-five tobacco-plants, and fifty sugar-cane." These gratifying results have been arrived at without friction so far as the Samoans are concerned.

EUROPEAN PLANTATIONS.

While the large plantations controlled by the Crown Estates, in particular those at Mulifanua, Vaitete, and Vailele, have been maintained at the high standard of cultivation arrived at in recent years, there is a number among the minor cultivations the condition of which leaves much to be desired. Several properties—a few privately owned—have been practically abandoned, and are rapidly reverting to bush. In these cases there are no funds available from any source to meet the expense of cleaning them up. Under the circumstances, all that the Department has been able to do is to provide facilities for the Samoans to search over these derelict lands for the beetle, which, if entirely neglected, would become a menace to the surrounding cultivations. The Beetle Inspector allocated to the European lands has found it a hard task of late to keep things up to the mark. Our planters are at present experiencing very hard times indeed. High overhead charges, aggravated by the low prices ruling for tropical products, constitute a depressing factor which explains why some owners and occupiers are tempted to neglect the cleaning-up of their lands.