

4. The Native health has been impaired seriously owing to having learnt to make and drink "home brew," as a result of the liquor prohibition to Europeans.

LABOUR AND AGRICULTURE.—EUROPEAN PLANTERS' REPORT.

We have the honour to submit a report on "Labour and Agriculture," prepared by representatives of the European planters of Western Samoa, for your consideration.

The immediate seriousness of the European planters' position in the Mandated Territory of Western Samoa cannot possibly be exaggerated or underestimated. Notwithstanding we have been unremitting in our efforts and have practised the most rigid economy in the management of our plantations, the more fortunate of us are barely clearing expenses. We are unable to build up a reserve fund to tide us over bad seasons and unforeseen contingencies, and as a consequence a bad blow or a poor harvest bring us heavily into debt. The greater number of us, despite our most strenuous efforts, are steadily losing ground and accumulating debts, which under favourable conditions will take us years to pay off. The outlook is most discouraging, and unless steps are taken to relieve the situation we fear it will be a matter of the greatest difficulty for many of us to carry on.

The majority of the planters have been farming in Samoa since before the War; some of us have been in the Territory for over twenty years. We are thoroughly familiar with every phase of our work, and are farming our holdings as economically as it is consistent with good management, and we can honestly assure you that the position we find ourselves in to-day is through no mismanagement or negligence upon our part. Surely our Mandatory must grasp the fact that the time is over-ripe when the planter and his investments are worthy of sympathy and protection. It is not conceivable that the Government will allow our agricultural industries to languish and die out for want of the necessary nourishment they require in the form of economic labour.

The planter must be ensured a reasonable income for his effort; he has a right to assert his right to a fair reward. We petition you most humbly and earnestly to impress upon the Government you represent the urgency and the vital necessity of securing labour for us whose rate of pay will reduce our cost of production to compare with that of similar industries in other tropical countries.

It cannot be claimed by the Government that they were not conversant with the economic effect of labour in relation to agriculture in Samoa, as, in a report on "Labour and Agriculture" prepared by the Citizens' Committee for presentation to Sir James Allen, Hon. Minister of Defence, and honourable members of the parliamentary party who visited Samoa in 1920, every argument that could be brought to bear was propounded in an endeavour to impress them with the seriousness of the position. We quote from that report:—

"We hope to prove to you that upon your deliberations depends the future of the colony, whether it is to be an asset to the Government you represent or a useless burden on the New Zealand taxpayers; we hope to prove to you that without an adequate supply of economic labour it will be impossible for the planters to carry on, with the inevitable result that the plantations will be forced to close down. By dint of never relaxing industry and sheer perseverance some of us have managed to keep our heads above water, but we can honestly assure you it has been a most strenuous fight, carried on with but little assistance from the Government, and none from the bank."

Again, "Chinese indentured labour was first introduced to Samoa in 1902 by the Planters' Association, it having even at that early stage been found by costly experience impossible to depend upon the local labour supply, and that in order to be in a position to compete with other tropical countries more favourably situated an adequate supply of cheap labour was essential."

The above opinions were those of experienced planters, thoroughly acquainted with every aspect of the situation, and as such should most decidedly have been treated with the utmost consideration and respect.

The planter can truly be represented only by the planter. The public official may be a wise guide and counsellor, and if so his word ought to be listened to and heeded, but no public official, not even the Director of Agriculture, has the power to speak in the same fashion about the needs and wants and demands of the planters as has the working planter, or the representative designated by the Planters' Association to speak for it.

Economic labour whose all-in cost would compare with that of labourers in other tropical countries, and has not been supplied, with the result that, as anticipated, many private planters, pioneers of the planting industry in Samoa, men who have invested all their hard-earned capital in Samoa and struggled on always hoping for better conditions, were at last forced to lay down their tools and surrender the plantations they had won from the virgin bush, burdened down by debts that, despite their great and untiring efforts, increased yearly. A number of the old planters have gone, broken in health and spirit from their great fight against insurmountable difficulties.

The Crown Estates, unable to farm their cacao plantations, profitably leased them out, together with other properties that had come under their control through the Public Trustee, to private individuals and ex-employees at a nominal rent. In this manner a new group of planters have sprung up in Samoa, and these new planters find themselves to-day in an identical position and faced with the same problems as the planters were in 1920, and pray you to strain every effort to secure for them a reduction of labour costs to meet the immediate necessities of the industry.

The points we have been instructed to bring to your notice are:—

1. LABOUR.

It is contended by the planters that the present high cost of labour is killing the planting industry in Samoa and driving away potential investors; that the margin between the cost of production and the price realized for our products is barely sufficient to pay working-expenses; that unless our cost of production can be reduced it is feared many of us will have to close down.