

Rarotonga.

This island is beyond all doubt the most fertile and valuable of the Cook Group, and has the largest population; but it is at the same time one of the least planted, for there are many tracts of land of the best quality on the south-west and north-west coasts that produce little, if anything. In proof of this assertion I may quote the instance of two sections of land leased to Messrs. Connal and Davis respectively. At the date of the lease there were, perhaps, two hundred cocoa-palms on the hundred acres; there are now nearly six thousand, and many young orange-trees of the best varieties. The result of this planting will be that within the next eight years the annual value of the produce of this land will be over £5 per acre. I do not say that all of the land is in the same position, for such is not the case, seeing that we export nearly 4,000 tons of produce every year; but there are extensive tracts of the coral littoral—a variety of soil very suitable to the growth of cocoanuts—that have not one palm to the acre growing thereon, and it may safely be affirmed that no single acre of land produces even half of the fruit that might be obtained therefrom. This unsatisfactory condition of affairs may be explained by the fact that most of the inhabitants are mere tenants at will, and liable to ejection from their land and homes at the mere caprice of their overlord, under whom they and their ancestors have lived for many generations. Under such a system prosperity is not possible, for it cannot be expected that a man will plant cocoanuts and watch over them continually in order to save them from the wandering horses unless he has some guarantee that his children will reap the benefit of his labour. Still less can he be expected to fence the land with coral-rock walls—the only lasting material in this climate—for it must not be forgotten that no benefit will be derived by the planter of cocoanuts for ten long years.

The land-tenure of Rarotonga may be described as follows: In very ancient times the land was divided among the crew of the canoe who first took possession of the island, and the representatives of the eldest branch of each family are now known as Arikis or Mataiapos, according to their original rank on landing. These chiefs have at all times been recognised as trustees for all the descendants of the original ancestor who continued to reside on the land; but they now claim the right to expel any man who dares to assert his independent rights or act in any manner contrary to the views of his overlord. In olden days, when it was essential to the existence of a tribe that all should be of one mind and obedient to the chief, any one disputing his will might well have been turned off the land with the consent of the whole tribe. Now, however, the consent of the tribe is not always deemed to be necessary by either Ariki or Mataiapo. There are difficulties connected with this land-tenure, but they can, I think, be settled without injury to the chiefs, and very much to the benefit of the *tangata rikiriki* (inferior people). If all other methods fail, it might be well for the local or New Zealand Government to lease the waste lands of any chief, settle the claims of those who have rights thereon by reason of long occupation, and sublet the residue to any one anxious to take up lands. That the chiefs have rights over the lands cannot be denied, but that they have exclusive rights to the injury of the people who for more than twenty generations have cultivated that land is absurd; and no improvement can be hoped for or expected until each cultivator has his own plot of land assured to him either in fee-simple or by perpetual lease at a nominal rent.

The people of Rarotonga are not naturally industrious, nor have they had any reason for becoming so, but as they are quite alive to the value of European goods we may fairly conclude that they would work willingly enough, and in proof of this contention I may say that I know of several men who have gone to Tahiti or Maldon to work in order that they might purchase a bicycle or buggy. Industry would probably follow good land regulations, which should compel a certain amount of fencing to be done every year. The local Government might be empowered to call out all of the able-bodied population for ten days' fencing in each year, and prisoners ought to be employed in this very useful work.

Mangaia.

This is probably the least fertile of the islands of the Cook Group, though it is one of the largest. The soil is comparatively poor throughout, and the eastern side is a desert of basalt rock. The people are, however, among the most industrious of the Polynesians—a fact that is probably due to the circumstances under which they live, for on this island the native food does not grow in the same profusion as at other places in the group, and men are compelled to cultivate in order that they may live.

Since the introduction of Christianity the tribes of Mangaia have occupied the coast villages of Oneroa, Ivirua, and Tamarua, but they still derive most of their food from the taro swamps in the centre of the island, all of which has to be carried on the backs of the people, who have but little breadfruit or plantain, and have not too many cocoanuts.

The coffee grown in Mangaia is the best in the group, not from any superiority of soil or climate, but that greater care is exercised in the picking and drying of the berries, the result being that it is worth at least $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a pound more than the Rarotonga berry. The elevated coral reef would also seem to suit the citrus family, for both limes and citrons grow wild in abundance; but the uncertainty of communication which has hitherto been the rule between this island and the outside world has checked the development of the limejuice industry.

The native tribes of Mangaia deserve a very favourable report, inasmuch as they have for the last three years planted cocoanuts on all the waste lands adjacent to their homes, and more than this could not reasonably be expected. It is sufficient to induce the hope that they will in the not very remote future bring their exports up to the level of the years 1891–92, at which date cotton was grown in large quantities, and the annual value of the produce exported was probably not less than £8,000. Since that date many of the people have emigrated, and there are now about two hundred and fifty living at Rarotonga and perhaps two hundred at Tahiti, men who for the most part have been driven from their homes by the tyrannical administration of the old laws by