

The average of 39 deaths per thousand is not only appalling, but absolutely unnecessary, and avoidable to a certain extent. The Ariki families have inbred to such a degree that they are for the most part incapable of reproduction, and they must and will die out, in accordance with the inflexible laws of nature; but there is no reason why most of the people should not live out the natural span of man's life, provided always that the relatives will keep the tohunga out of the house, and call in the doctor before it is too late. The whole difficulty of the situation lies in the fact that the Government may provide an efficient medical service, and the Natives may—as they once did in New Zealand—refuse to avail themselves of such service.

From certain remarks made in the Parliament of New Zealand during the session of 1907 I gather that it was believed that the Government of that colony might have done much towards improving the health of the inhabitants of the Cook and Northern Islands. My experience, gained during a residence of ten years among these people, gives me no ground to hope that any action the Government might take would be beneficial to the Natives, who are, without exception, the most cruel and callous people towards their sick relatives that can be found at the present day. If you should ask the question as to whether the sick person has been fed, they will tell you that he has not, and that it was unnecessary to feed him, as he was sure to die. They are both obstinate and superstitious, and cling to their old methods and tohungas.

A knowledge of the circumstances under which these people live would justify the belief that they ought to be the healthiest people in the world. They have certainly the finest climate in the Pacific, and their villages are built on the dry coral strand open to the sea-breeze. Their houses, as a rule, are superior to those of the New Zealand farmer, for they are built on a platform of lime and coral impervious to damp, and the walls are of the same material. The rooms are seldom less than 20 ft. square, and the only weak point is the iron roof; but even this fault is neutralised by the habits of the people, who for the most part live during the day on the shady side of the house, under the verandah. As for the food of the Polynesian, it is of the healthiest, being mostly fruit or vegetables—viz., taro, plantain, breadfruit, and kumara, the kinaki being fish, and occasionally pork.

Notwithstanding all these advantages of climate, good houses, and healthy food, the death-rate is apt to exceed that of the births, and this is the case even when we can point to no special epidemic to account for the abnormal number of deaths. The true solution of this unfortunate condition may not be ignored. In introducing Christianity and civilisation to this ignorant and superstitious people we have also introduced the seeds of certain diseases previously unknown to Polynesia—diseases that are scarcely considered dangerous to life by Europeans, but which will, under certain circumstances, carry off 30 per cent. of the inhabitants of any one of these islands. That which the Maori really requires we are unable to give him—namely, a European constitution, tried and hardened by familiarity with many diseases during the past five hundred years, and by which we have acquired something like immunity. We are the survival of the fittest; the Maori has not reached that position.

As for the tohunga, he is as dangerous to the well-being of the people of the Cook Islands as he has been in New Zealand for any time during the last fifty years, and in either place he will not easily be suppressed, for the simple reason that the Maori has more faith in the tohunga than in the doctor. There are certain aspects of the Maori mind most difficult to deal with. For instance, if the first dose of medicine does not effect an immediate cure, it is no good, and he will have no more of it. Again, he cannot see that the food he is eating can have any connection with, or effect on, the malady from which he suffers, and therefore, if his complaint be dysentery, he will continue to eat taro or unripe mangoes, and his wife will neglect to cook him proper food, because she cannot see the necessity for so doing.

The point which I wish to make clear is this: The Government can do nothing; but the doctor can do almost anything if the people have confidence in him. If he has personal influence he may do as Dr. G. Craig and Dr. Pomare have done; both of these gentlemen were listened to and obeyed. The Natives do not want professional ability in their doctor so much as firmness of character, and above all things good address. If he has not the latter the Natives will not go near him. The present Medical Officer of the Cook Islands is most unpopular by reason of a bad or gruff manner, and, as a natural consequence, the Natives will either neglect to call him in, or, if they do call upon him, it will only be when the patient is *in extremis*.

#### LEPROSY.

The Native members of the London Mission have evidently been selected by fate as the special victims of this loathsome disease. In my last report I mentioned that Ioane, the teacher of Tukao, in the Island of Manihiki, had been isolated as a leper. This man has since died, and his family, who had lived with him in the same house, are under careful supervision. Since then a young missionary who had been brought from Penrhyn and placed as a teacher at Tauhou (Manihiki) found that he was a leper, and reported the fact to our agent, Mr. Williams. This young man Te Maari behaved exceedingly well in this matter, for he alone of all of the infected people has insisted on his own isolation, and shown some regard for the danger to others—namely, the danger of any infected person being at large. The whole family have now left for their own home in the French island of Rurutu. I may remark that the Government agents in charge of the Northern Islands receive no assistance from the Natives in stamping out this terrible disease; they will if possible hide any case they may know of from the Government officer, and connive at sly visits made by relatives to afflicted men.

The man and woman whom I reported last year as living isolated at Aitutaki are clearly not lepers, but suffering from a peculiar skin-disease, and may with advantage to the general public remain in isolation.