

At the Island of Aitutaki I held a local-option poll, in order to settle the question as to whether the people of that place really did require the introduction and sale of wine and beer. The result of the poll was conclusive, inasmuch that 237 voted for total prohibition as against 115 for wine and beer.

At Mangaia Mr. Goodwin acted as Returning Officer at the election of a member for the Federal Parliament, and I may say that this is the first occasion on which any real election has taken place in these islands.

I have, &c.,

W. E. GUDGEON,
British Resident.

His Excellency the Earl of Ranfurly, K.C.M.G.,
Governor of New Zealand.

No. 20.

His Excellency the GOVERNOR to Lieut.-Colonel GUDGEON.

SIR,—

Government House, Wellington, 16th December, 1899.

No. 1.

I have the honour to inform you that I have received Her Majesty's wishes, through the Secretary of State for the Colonies, as to the offer made by Daniela Tangitoru, a chief of Mangaia.

I am directed by Her Majesty to express her appreciation of the loyal spirit which has prompted this gift of land, which Her Majesty will have pleasure in accepting.

I have, &c.,

RANFURLY.

Lieut.-Colonel Gudgeon, British Resident, Rarotonga.

No. 21.

Lieut.-Colonel GUDGEON to His Excellency the GOVERNOR.

MY LORD,—

The Residency, Rarotonga, 4th January, 1900.

I have the honour to forward, for your information, a report on the trade of the Cook Islands for the year ending the 31st December, 1899.

I have, &c.,

W. E. GUDGEON,
British Resident.

His Excellency the Earl of Ranfurly, K.C.M.G.,
Governor of New Zealand.

Enclosure.

REPORT ON THE TRADE PROSPECTS AND SOCIAL CONDITION OF THE COOK ISLANDS.

I HAVE to report that the trade prospects of this group show signs of improvement. During my late visit to the outlying islands of the Federation I found it necessary to comment in strong terms on the fact that at least two-thirds of the area of the group was practically unproductive, by reason of the fact that the owners of the soil had neglected to plant the coral formation with cocoanuts, and had done comparatively little to improve even the most fertile lands. I also pointed out that in the event of a hurricane many of the old cocoanut-trees would be destroyed, and therefore they would have absolutely no export for the ensuing eight or ten years, since they had no young trees planted to take the place of those that would be destroyed. I cannot say that I expected that any good result would follow my remarks, inasmuch as the Cook Islanders are too easy-going to take into consideration prospective privations or benefits. But I am now in a position to report that my view of the situation has impressed the native owners of the soil to this extent: that they are planting both cocoanuts and bananas in very large quantities, and therefore there is a prospect that at no very distant date the trade of these islands with New Zealand will be very largely increased, for there is no reason why the export should not be fivefold the present quantity.

I regret that I have to report that the coffee-crop of last year, which at one period bade fair to be abundant, has proved almost a failure. Late in the season the trees were attacked by the Ceylon leaf-blight, which it would seem was introduced by a Mr. Dodge, who, about the year 1896, imported several hundred coffee-plants to this island. The result has been that Rarotonga is not likely to appear as an exporter of coffee for many years to come, since the whole of the old trees have been killed right out. Fortunately, this blight has not reached the Islands of Mangaia or Aitutaki, but this is of small moment as compared with Rarotonga, since the last-named island has always exported ten times the weight of coffee produced by the two former. The failure of this important item of export has made it imperative that copra should as much as possible take its place, and therefore that cocoanut planting should be encouraged.

There is at present every prospect of a very large orange-crop, and I confidently anticipate that the amount available for export will be at least twice that of last year. This is a position that might easily be maintained or exceeded, if the native owners could only be brought to see the necessity for pruning, and artificial manures. At the present moment the natural impression on the mind of any stranger would be that orange-trees were grown in Rarotonga not so much for their fruit as for timber purposes.

It is a matter for regret that we have a very indifferent class of foreign settlers on the Island of Rarotonga—men from whom Maoris can learn nothing useful. Of those who have leased land only one man has attempted to improve his property. Others have come here having but little experience of the mysteries of tropical agriculture, but none the less firmly convinced that they could teach the Maoris how to manage their lands. In the case of these men the result has been