

Rarotonga is certainly the finest island in the Cook Group, both in point of scenic attractions and in respect of its general productiveness. It is a particularly good specimen of the volcanic order of islands, and the rugged grandeur of its mountain-peaks and the variety and luxuriance of its vegetation combine to present one of the most romantic and picturesque scenes that one could possibly find even in the South Seas, where the romantic and the picturesque are supposed to abound. Attaining, as it does, a height of 3,000 ft., the island is well watered; and a belt of rich alluvial soil, varying from one to two miles in width, extends all round from the mountains to the sea. The circumference of Rarotonga is over twenty miles, and it will be seen, therefore, that the area available for cultivation is by no means inconsiderable. The land at present is not being utilised to anything like the full extent of its possibilities, and, while it is true that the existing land-tenure operates somewhat against a more systematic and extensive cultivation of the soil by the Natives, there does not appear to be any insuperable difficulty in the way of the complete development of the resources of the island. The Land Titles Court is doing good work, and there seems to be a growing inclination on the part of the Arikis to lease their lands to suitable tenants, preferably Europeans. A considerable portion of the island has been surveyed, and with the advent of a larger European population we may look for a steady increase in the yield of the staple products of the island. In the case of copra it will be some years before the production can be greatly increased, but the cocoa-palm is being extensively planted, and, given favourable conditions, the results may be awaited with confidence. The banana trade is developing satisfactorily, and as Rarotonga is particularly well adapted to the growth of the banana, the outlook so far as this item is concerned is distinctly hopeful. The coffee industry, which received a check a few years ago in consequence of an attack of leaf-blight, is once more in a satisfactory condition. This year's crop has turned out well, and, according to latest reports from the island, some large purchases had been made by traders, while the quality of the commodity was first class. The education of the island is conducted by the London Missionary Society, and good work is being accomplished. The mission training-school at Avarua supplies teachers for many of the other islands; and at Tereora, two miles from Avarua, there is a mission boarding and training school, for the support of which the island Government makes a yearly contribution of £2 10s. for each pupil up to fifty. Good service has been done, too, by the Roman Catholic Mission; and the Seventh Day Adventists have also contributed something to the educational work on the island. The population of Rarotonga is nearly 2,100, about seventy being Europeans.

Sunday, 26th April (Saturday according to island time).—Hon. Mr. Mills and Lieut.-Colonel Gudgeon interviewed Queen Makea, who kindly promised to make arrangements for entertaining the party during that day and the following Monday. They then proceeded to the Government Buildings, where a deputation was received and a large amount of departmental business was attended to. A presentation of mats, &c., was made to the Minister in the palace-grounds, and the Atiu and Avarua Natives, dressed in black, performed a dance and sang a song of lamentation over the death of Ngamaru, who had been chief of the Islands of Atiu, Mauke, and Mitiaro, as well as the principal Ariki of Rarotonga. The voices blended sweetly in the plaintive music of the song, the burden of which was "He is dead; he has flown away like a bird; he is sleeping a long sleep." After this a song and dance of welcome were performed in honour of the Minister and party.

In the afternoon an interesting exhibition of pedestal dancing was given by the Arorangi Natives, and the tasteful pink-and-white costumes of the dancers contrasted agreeably with the garb of mourning worn by Makea's people during the performance earlier in the day. It was a unique display, and one which will long be remembered by those who were privileged to see it. During the afternoon the members of the party were entertained at the Mission Station, where afternoon tea was dispensed by Mesdames Gudgeon, Lawrence, and others. The Minister, meanwhile, was busily engaged in conference with the five Arikis of Rarotonga—Makea, Tinomana, Pa, Karika, and Kainuku. The following is a report of the conference:—

CONFERENCE between MINISTER IN CHARGE OF THE ISLANDS and the ARIKIS OF RAROTONGA, held in the residence of Queen Makea, Rarotonga, 26th April, 1903.

*Colonel Gudgeon*: Mr. Mills,—The whole of the five Arikis of Rarotonga are now before you, and I believe they have something to say to you. They wish Mr. Lawrence to interpret.

*Hon. Mr. Mills*: I shall be pleased to hear anything they have to say, if Mr. Lawrence will kindly interpret for them.

*Pa Ariki*: We, the chiefs of the island, have met here under the power and protection of New Zealand, and now the Minister has come from New Zealand to convey to us the wishes of the Government of New Zealand. Our minds go back, and we think of our first words and the first revealing of our wishes. We petitioned the Queen of Britain that there might be left still in Rarotonga a meeting of chiefs—that is, the Council. We petitioned also that Makea should be left as the head of that Council, and that Colonel Gudgeon should still be left with us to be our guide and councillor. The Governor of New Zealand came here, and he also told us that it would be so. We meet in the one place that the work on the land may be done.

*Hon. Mr. Mills*: What is that—surveying?

*Mr. Lawrence*: No; they meet here for the discussion of any work that is to be done in connection with the government of the islands.

*Pa Ariki*: We have learned, and have done the work that was left us to do, and so also has the Resident. We have done all the work that has required to be done—that is, in the administration of the law in the island—and we have had no trouble whatever. But we now hear that certain of the foreign residents that live amongst us wish one of their number added to our Council, and that one of their number should also become a member of the New Zealand House