

The Land Titles Court may claim that it has not only settled numerous disputes which have hitherto unsettled the minds of landowners, but it has also conserved the rights of many orphans, and of the more ignorant members of the community, who, under other circumstances, would have been ousted from their properties by the clever men of the island. That it will be a serious expense to the owners to survey and obtain titles to their numerous small holdings is true, but the people are very much alive to the necessity for so doing, and think but little of the cost so long as they can bring about exchanges and consolidate their scattered properties. I have already said that in many of the cases brought before the Court the area of the claim has been insignificant, but this does not affect the value thereof. In some instances as many as a hundred cocoa-palms may be seen growing on a single acre and bearing well, and as each of these palms is valued at 10s. the land and trees cannot be said to be worth less than £60 per acre.

Two valuable sites have been acquired by the Government on this island under the provisions of subsection (10A) of section 10 of the Order in Council establishing the Land Titles Court. Section 1, Arutanga, at the end of the wharf, has been secured as a site for landing and shipping sheds at a cost of £28, and Section 3 as a Courthouse Reserve, at a cost of £13 10s. This last-mentioned piece is the site of the island Courthouse, the ground-rent of which has heretofore been £4 10s., a most absurd price for the eighth of an acre. With reference to these purchases I have the honour to point out that in the first instance we have not only a site for the Customhouse shed, which is badly required, but can also lease the remainder of the land at a price that will return 10 per cent. interest on the outlay. In the second purchase we save £4 10s. per annum, and obtain a good title to the Courthouse for an outlay of £13 10s.

Rarotonga.

In this island detached surveys have been made both in the Avarua and Arorangi districts, wherever titles have been in dispute, or where leases granted to Europeans have rendered such work expedient. In all ninety-five blocks have been surveyed, at a cost of £156, and the titles thereto have been defined by the Court at a further cost to the owners of £135 15s. 6d. It is, however, the Takitumu district that has been selected as the real point of commencement for the general survey of the island. For this selection there are many good reasons, for the district has from the most ancient times been divided among the numerous Mataiapo families of Takitumu, and therefore the definition of title is simple; and, further, the Titikaveka lands have for years been lying waste and unoccupied, and, worse still, unimproved. It is this latter fact that has induced me to select the coast-line from Papua to Titikaveka as the scene of the first regular and continuous survey of the island, it being obvious that unoccupied lands would be more easily acquired under lease from the Native owners than the occupied lands nearer to the shipping port.

Most of this selected district has now been surveyed—viz., thirty-nine blocks fronting the sea, of a total area of 870 acres, or an average of 22 acres per holding, of which nine blocks, containing 273 acres, have been leased to Europeans, leaving 597 acres in the hands of the Natives.

Of the hilly land in the rear of the coast-belt 535 acres have been surveyed and leased to Europeans. Of this land probably not more than 130 acres is capable of any sort of cultivation; it is, however, intended to plant bananas in the moist and sheltered valleys, but the chief object of the lessees is to preserve the timber on the steep slopes of the hills, by keeping the careless Natives out of the valleys and thereby reducing the risk of fires.

I have personally inspected the 870 acres of coast lands above mentioned, and would divide it into three zones: First, the coral sand or littoral zone, extending inland about 10 chains, valuable only for cocoanut and kumara plantations; second, the old taro swamps of the very best land, which must at one time have formed the old bed of the lagoon, and which extend from 8 to 10 chains inland; third, the foot slopes of the mountains, rising gently from the old lagoon to the hills, valuable for any purpose of tropical agriculture, and extending inland any distance from 20 chains to a mile.

Of the first class I found that not more than a fifth of the area was planted with trees of economic value. The second class was lying almost entirely waste. The third had a few cocoanuts, bananas, and orange-trees growing thereon, but not more than a fifth of the area was producing either food or articles of saleable value. The European lessees have with characteristic energy cleared and planted their lands during the first year of the lease, Mr. H. M. Connal being the pioneer in this matter. It is now five years since he planted 50 acres with seventy cocoapalms to the acre, and a few of these trees are already in bloom, but for the next three years only a small crop can be expected. After that date he will, however, receive full value for his expenditure, and this will continue for the next sixty years.

These cocoanut plantations will prove of very great importance to these Islands, not only by reason of the value of the crop—which cannot be estimated at less than £6 per acre per annum—but also from the fact that each fifty acres will provide employment for at least four men, and last, but by no means least, large numbers of sheep and cattle will be fed on the luxuriant undergrowth beneath the palms, and provide supplies of fresh meat instead of the present tinned article; thus making this island a more pleasant and less expensive place of residence than at present.

The lands already leased are, in every instance, the property of men who own large tracts of country on the north or east coasts of this island, nearer to the port of Avarua, at which they can ship their oranges and bananas without much labour, and for this and other reasons the Titikaveka district, being ten miles distant from Avarua, has been neglected and left for the most part in the hands of Mangaian emigrants, who have in many instances left their own island for its good and do nothing for the land they now occupy on sufferance, but are contented with a bare existence derived from the natural products of the district, the nuts stolen from the more industrious Natives, and the manufacture of bush beer. Such men are useless and a source of annoyance to any community, and hence my anxiety to break up this Mangaian settlement by inducing the landowners to lease their waste lands to industrious Europeans, who would speedily cause this fertile tract of country to produce a ton of copra to the acre. At least 1,500 acres that at pre-