

Enclosure.

Sir,—

Rarotonga, 15th May, 1905.

Re *Fruit from Cook Group.*

Your committee has the honour to acknowledge receipt of your letter of 5th April, containing an extract from a letter from the Hon. the Minister for the Islands, and covering a return showing the importations of tropical fruit into New Zealand for 1904, and to thank you for the same.

The Hon. the Minister is apparently in doubt as to whether—in view of the data comprising the return for 1904—this Group can supply the whole of the fruit needed for New Zealand.

Your committee would point out that of the fruit at present imported, from 15 to 20 per cent. probably never reaches the consumer, the periodical glutting of the market by steamers from other islands making a large quantity of it unsaleable, and from the fact that, in the case of bananas, a monthly service is not frequent enough. This fruit matures so rapidly that fruit too immature to ship by one steamer, very often, when shipped by the next boat, arrives too ripe. The imposition of a duty would probably obviate this waste, inasmuch as such a spur to production would so largely increase the output from here as to induce the shipping company to put on a fortnightly service.

We have no hesitation in reiterating our former statement that, given a limited amount of protection, this Group can, within a very reasonable time, supply the whole of the fruit needed; indeed, in our opinion, Rarotonga alone could soon do this.

In confirmation of our statement we would call the Minister's attention to the marked increase shown in our fruit-exports for the first four months of this year, as compared with the same period of 1904, and this in spite of the fact that the whole of the Islands, other than Rarotonga, have been seriously damaged by the exceptionally heavy gales.

Comparative Statement.—Export of Fruit for First Four Months of Years 1904 and 1905.

	1904.	1905.
Bananas, cases	10,969	17,695
„ bunches	3,376	5,549
Oranges, cases	17,530	25,697

If we leave out the other islands, and give only the returns for Rarotonga, which did not suffer from the gales, the result is even more encouraging, as under:—

	1904.	1905.
Bananas, cases	7,979	16,106
„ bunches	3,345	5,549
Oranges, cases	9,972	23,326

This, moreover, is largely in excess of the increase foreshadowed in the last report of the committee, and the returns for the later months should show a larger proportionate increase as, up to the present, the results of the recent planting do not show, and we cannot refrain from reiterating that it is largely due to the fact that, after the visit of the Hon. the Minister in Charge, the Native growers were satisfied that the Government would take some steps to give them an assured profitable market. We regret to say that up to now the result has been far from satisfactory. Large shipments from Tahiti and elsewhere have so disorganized the market that oranges have been shipped at a loss to growers, and at the present time there are tons of fruit rotting on the ground, or being made into bush beer, for want of a market. If the grower can ship his fruit at a profit he will do so, but if not then he will make bush beer largely.

In conclusion, sir, the *sine qua non* of the success of the fruit industry is an assured market, and, failing some definite assurance from the Government, your committee is not by any means sanguine of a further increase. On the contrary, Native growers are much disheartened up to the present time, and we have before us the results in both cotton and coffee, the former of which has gone out of production, and the latter is rapidly doing so. There has not been 1 ton of coffee cured in Rarotonga this year in consequence of the unremunerative market. Should the fruit industry follow the result must be most disastrous, not only in the loss of what might be the most prosperous and is one of the most suitable industries for a Native race of landowners, but also in the loss of confidence in a Government which, whilst protecting the fruit-growers in New Zealand proper, refuses its Native subjects a similar measure of protection.

One more matter the committee wishes to bring under the notice of the Hon. the Minister. At present we have to go outside of New Zealand to find a market for the bulk of our copra and lime-juice. In the case of the former article Tonga enters largely into competition with us, and in the latter instance lime-juice is unsaleable largely through the importations into New Zealand of acids for the manufacture of so-called lime-juice cordials.

We have, &c.,

PERCY BROWN.

THOS. SHEARMAN.

MAKEA DANIELA.

J. W. SHARPE (Chairman).

Lieut.-Colonel Gudgeon, C.M.G., Rarotonga.

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