

Roughly, the figures work out as follows :—

		Births per Thousand.	Deaths per Thousand.
Rarotonga	.. .. .	45	34
Mangaia	.. .. .	40	22.6
Aitutaki	.. .. .	42	30

It is worthy of notice that these statistics show that the birth-rate is higher in the chief villages and ports of the island, such as Arutanga, Avarua, and Oneroa. The other villages see but little of the travelling public. It is therefore clear that the general health and well-being of these Islands is but little affected by the visits of strangers. That disease is occasionally brought in from Tahiti we know, but it does not affect the birth-rate.

#### THE FRUIT INDUSTRY.

About the month of June last it was thought advisable that representations should be made to the Government of New Zealand to the effect that the local Administration was prepared to pay £250 per annum towards the salary and expenses of a Fruit Inspector, provided that a trained officer of the Dominion Agricultural Department should be appointed. This proviso was an essential, for we had a right to assume that an officer who had authority to examine and pass fruit at a New Zealand port might also be considered reliable even though stationed for a time in the Cook Islands.

Mr. Reid arrived here in July, and has proved himself a most capable and active officer, and under the orders of his Department in New Zealand has done good work in a limited degree, for he has not been allowed to examine the fruit shipped with the view of preventing all disease from entering New Zealand.

The fruit industry of these Islands has of late years assumed great importance, and, so far as the southern markets are concerned, has been greatly assisted by the Government of New Zealand in the matter of the Wellington line of steamers. Under ordinary treatment we might soon be in a position to supply all New Zealand with tropical fruits; but under any circumstances it would surely be better to have all doubtful fruit inspected here rather than put the producers to the expense of paying for boxes and freight with the prospect of having their fruit destroyed on arrival in New Zealand.

It is this uncertainty that has injured our trade in the past and prevented the proper development of the Islands, for it cannot be expected that the producers will plant out new orchards of the orange-tree, or, indeed, take any interest in a trade wherein they are forced to ship fruit at great expense that may be destroyed on arrival. At the present time New Zealand takes the revenue derived from fruit-inspection. We on our part are ready to employ and pay two officials of the Department from New Zealand (one of them during the orange season only), but we cannot do this unless we can charge a moderate sum of 1d. per case in order to pay the salary of these officers, and this we cannot do if we know that a similar charge is to be made in New Zealand.

I submit that the presence of a Fruit Inspector on these Islands will insure that no fly-infected fruit will be sent to New Zealand, for the simple reason that it will be possible to subject our fruit to a much more severe examination than is possible in either Auckland or Wellington. Here we have generally four days in which to inspect from four to five thousand cases of oranges, and can therefore do it thoroughly. In either of the ports above mentioned there may be twice that number of cases to examine, and much of the work must necessarily be perfunctory.

All that the fruit-growers hope or expect is that the Dominion will provide an effective staff at the expense of the Islands to inspect the fruit before leaving our shores, and will accept the certificates of their own officers as final.

The progress made by the Takuvaine Fruit Company during the last twelve months is most encouraging. They have realised that honest dealing and care in the packing of their fruit is an essential of success. The result has been that their shipments are sought after, and fetch the highest prices in the New Zealand market. This object-lesson cannot fail to act favourably on the future of the fruit trade.

We have not yet reached the point of progress represented by the grading of oranges, but the people will sooner or later reach this point under the tuition of Mr. Reid.

In concluding this subject, I may say that the whole future of this Group depends on the reception of the certificate issued by the Inspector appointed to these Islands.

#### THE LAND TITLES COURT.

During the year ending 31st March, 1909, this Court has held sittings on fifty-one days, during which 358 orders were made, and fees imposed to the amount of £623 7s. 3d. The fees collected and paid into the Treasury during the year were £578 16s. 1d., making a total of £2,436 5s. 11d., from this source collected and paid into the Treasury since the inception of the Court. The fees outstanding to date amount to £1,549 3s., and will be easily collected at the rate of about £600 per annum.

Up to the 31st March last the titles to no less than 1,623 blocks of land have been heard and decided by the Court. Further details on these points will be seen on reference to Mr. Blaine's report, marked A, attached. It is now seven years since Mr. Blaine undertook the duties of Registrar of the Land Titles and High Courts, and during that period I have been greatly indebted to him by reason of his legal knowledge and the careful manner in which he has performed the duties of his several offices.