

## IMPORTS AND EXPORTS.

The trade of Niue for the year 1911 exceeded that of the previous year by £591, notwithstanding that, owing to the breakdown in the running of the subsidized schooner "Kereru," there was no vessel from Auckland to Niue between the 24th June and 7th December, and only one opportunity to ship produce to Auckland in that time.

The value of the imports was £9,838, or £656 more than the preceding year, while the exports amounted to £12,047, or £65 less than the year 1910. The total external trade of the island was £21,885.

Of the total imports, £6,717, or 68 per cent., came from New Zealand, while £8,300 worth, or 69 per cent., of the produce of Niue was sent to New Zealand. These figures do not compare favourably with those of last year, for the reason that, owing to the breakdown in the "Kereru's" running, the traders had perforce to obtain their goods and ship their produce from and to Australia and Samoa as opportunity offered.

The return of imports and exports which is appended hereto gives full details of the trade.

## TRADE PROSPECTS.

The business in Niue plaited hats has fallen off considerably during the past year. Only 4,782 dozens were exported in 1911, as against 5,716 dozens during the previous year. In the past three years there has been a steady decline in the demand and also in the price offered by New Zealand merchants. It appears that the principal factor in the decline is that the New Zealand market is being flooded with a cheap machine-made Java hat, which for appearance and durability cannot compare with the hand-plaited Niue hat. I am strongly of opinion that some further protection should be given to the Natives of Niue by the imposition of extra duties on this class of hat. I may say that the Natives show a strong disinclination to plait hats for the prices now being offered, and unless some assistance is granted to them the Niue hat trade, which has flourished for so many years, will soon be a thing of the past.

The indications for the copra crop for the coming season appear to be distinctly good, and with reasonable shipping facilities the output will be large. During the past year I have gone into the question of the great waste of young coconuts in Niue for drink, food, fish-bait, &c. As a result of my investigations I find that during each year young coconuts which, if left on the trees until they matured, would make approximately 1,000 tons of copra are wasted. By far the greatest waste in this direction is caused by the practice of using the young nuts for drinking purposes. The efforts of the Administration in providing a concrete reservoir in each village has to some extent minimized the practice, but the habits that have become so thoroughly ingrained in the daily life of the Natives are not changed in a year or two. As an illustration of the great waste, I may say that in one village in Niue where there are between two and three hundred people living, with a concrete reservoir of 12,000 gallons capacity nearly always full of water in the centre of the village, there are less than a dozen people who habitually drink the water. The remainder still drink the young coconuts, despite the fact that the reservoir has been built over five years. The Administration has now commenced to place tanks along the roads in the waterless interior to supply water for drinking purposes with the view of further reducing the waste, but much patience is necessary in dealing with these people. From the investigations I have made it is clear that, but for this extensive habit of drinking the young nuts, the output of copra would be something between 1,500 and 2,000 tons annually. I estimate that the annual waste arising from the foregoing causes represents a money value of at least £3 10s. per head per annum of the total population.

In November last, when the census was taken, an attempt was made to count the coconut-trees, and as many as 546,037 trees (young and old) were returned by the owners, while it is known that a great number of trees situated in the more remote parts of the island were not counted at all. The evidence of those Natives most qualified to express an opinion on the subject goes to show that the bearing trees approximate somewhere about 200,000, but great numbers of them are not attended to, belong to absentees, or are planted in unsuitable soil and bear but poorly. On the other hand, many of the Natives tend their trees well and are planting largely every year, and it is only reasonable to expect that their example will be emulated by others as soon as the advantages are brought home to them. With the gradual decline in the waste of young nuts, and the large number of young trees that are each year reaching the bearing stage, and the better care of the trees by the Natives which will come gradually, there is every reason to believe that the output of copra from Niue will now go on increasing year by year.

The Natives have during the past year expressed a strong desire to participate in the banana trade, but with the present service by sailing-ships the thing is impossible. The Natives have my sympathy in this matter, as I know that Niue can produce bananas of a superior quality and flavour to most of those produced in the islands now engaged in the trade. It is for this reason that a service by steamer between Niue and Nukualofa, to connect with the Union steamers, would best suit Niue, as, owing to the great distance from Auckland, it probably would not pay a steamer to trade direct. If this could be arranged it would place Niue within seven days of Auckland, and I am confident that a considerable trade in Niue fruit would quickly spring up.

The experiments in cotton-cultivation which have been going on for some time past have proved eminently successful, and it is highly probable that Niue will become a cotton-producing country ere long. I have referred to this matter in another part of this report.