

PUBLIC HEALTH.

During the year excellent work has been done in Rarotonga in looking after the health of the Natives. The Hospital, which is now furnished and thoroughly equipped, has been taken full advantage of by both the Natives and Europeans. During the year 4,512 out-patients were attended to at the Hospital, and 506 visits were paid by the Medical Officers to patients at their homes. During the last six months of the year in-patients were received at the institution, the number passing through in that time being fifty-three.

It was a matter for regret that the valuable services of Dr. Perceval, the Chief Medical and Health Officer, were lost to the Administration owing to his having accepted a much more important post offered to him in England. I append a copy of Dr. Perceval's letter of resignation:—

"SIR,—

"The Hospital, Rarotonga, 23rd October, 1911.

"It is with regret that I ask you to accept my resignation as Chief Medical and Health Officer to your Administration, and suggest the appointment of Dr. Baldwin in my stead. I am so doing on account of having accepted an appointment at Home at a considerable advance to my present salary.

"During my term of office I have received every consideration from you in carrying out my wishes with regard to work done under the Health Act. I have never found the slightest cause or reason for any friction. Personally I am sorry to have to sever my connection with you and my duties at the Hospital.

"The staff under me work well, are attentive to and zealous in the discharge of their duties, and I would wish, on their behalf, to bring this under your notice.

"I have, &c.,

"M. PERCEVAL, P.M.O.

"Captain J. Eman Smith, Resident Commissioner, Rarotonga."

I also append a letter addressed to me by the former Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Chesson, who was compelled, owing to the ill effect of the climate upon his health, to obtain a transfer to the Public Health Department of New Zealand,—

"SIR,—

"Wellington, 12th March, 1911.

"I regret to inform you that my health has not improved as rapidly as I had hoped, and I am advised by Dr. Mason that he does not consider it advisable that I should return to the tropics. I am sorry, therefore, to inform you that I have determined not to return to Rarotonga, but to accept a position in the Public Health Department of New Zealand, where I take up my duties on the 14th instant.

"I take this opportunity of thanking you for at all times so readily co-operating with me in all matters relating to my department, and for the consideration shown by you at all times, especially during my illness.

"I have, &c.,

"HERBERT CHESSEON,

"Chief Medical and Health Officer.

"Captain J. Eman Smith, Resident Commissioner, Rarotonga."

On the resignation of Dr. Perceval Dr. Baldwin was appointed Chief Medical and Health Officer, and he has now the assistance of Dr. Maclurkin, a gentleman chosen in England by the High Commissioner for the position.

This is the first time that the Administration has been in a position to send the Assistant Medical Officer round to the outlying islands to attend to the health of the Natives, numbering some 10,000 inhabitants. The Chief Medical Officer has to attend at Rarotonga to the health of some 2,600 Natives. In addition to the base Hospital, dispensaries have been established in all the villages at Rarotonga, and on stated days each week the Medical Officer attends at the various dispensaries. Those ailing Natives who are unable through illness to attend at the dispensaries are reported upon by the police stationed in each village, and the doctor proceeds to their residences to render medical aid.

In the case of the islands near to Rarotonga each European Resident Agent is provided monthly with a supply of drugs, and in the case of the outlying islands, on every available opportunity, with written instructions by the Chief Medical Officer how to administer the same.

As far back as the 22nd August, 1899, the following statement was made by the then British Resident, Colonel Gudgeon, in "An Act to provide for the Punishment of Offenders"—viz.: "And whereas an efficient hospital and medical staff has been provided in Rarotonga at the expense of the Federal Government, which same is open to all the inhabitants free of charge," &c. In a letter dated the 16th January, 1908—nine years later—addressed to the then Minister (*vide* A.—3, 1908, page 38) by Colonel Gudgeon, the fourth paragraph reads as follows: "As for the hospital, I have to report that any objection there may be to it is entirely professional, and it is at least up to the standard of New Zealand hospitals of twenty years ago. For the last three years it has, I believe, had only one Native inmate. Under these circumstances I have not felt justified in building a £500 hospital that would not be used."

These statements are somewhat misleading, as there was never a hospital that could be called such prior to my time. The building was an old rotten store, quite unfit for in-patients, and was merely used all these years as a dispensary. You yourself, when you saw the building, condemned it, and it was destroyed by fire at your request.

The letter above quoted shows that for three years prior to its date only one Native patient was received in the hospital, and I am in a position to state that since that date only three in-patients were ever admitted. At the present time the new Hospital is taxed to its utmost capacity to accommodate the in-patients offering, and patients are not only attended to by the Administration free of charge, but are fed and nursed at the expense of the State. This has been paid for out of direct Customs revenue, as no taxation has been imposed upon Natives or Europeans to cover the cost.