

NATIVE LANDS.

As shown by the diagrams on page 7 there are 581,370 acres of Native lands, of which 350,000 acres are cultivated, so that the land available is approximately 10 acres per head of the existing population—viz., 36,000. As they are in possession of far more land than they can cultivate, it is difficult to understand why the Natives are constantly engaged in land disputes, and continually submitting claims either to the Administrator or the Land and Titles Commission. A very large portion of my time is taken up with land questions.

As land has been the cause of many of the past wars with other sections of the Polynesian race, so also has it been at the root of most of the wars and dissensions of the Samoans. To hold a title carrying with it the *pule* or ownership of a large area of land is the highest ambition of the Samoan, not for the purpose of cultivating it and increasing his wealth, but chiefly for the prestige it gives him. Every acre of land, whether a lava-field, swamp, or mountain-top, is owned by some family. It is divided into areas of varying extent. Each area is owned (a better term would be “controlled”) by the Matai (head of family or tribe), who holds the title which carries with it the authority to use or control that area. This Matai or chief divides his area into portions for the various members of his family, a number of whom are married, with many dependants. Some Matais have large areas, and others barely sufficient.

Some of the descendants after marriage leave their village and reside in other districts with the family to which their wife belongs; others leave the village to take up occupations in Apia; some may go to Fiji or elsewhere; but these absentees retain their family rights, and when the Matai dies all have their say in the selection of his successor and the redistribution of the family or tribal land controlled by him. Very little imagination is required to appreciate the complex disputes that arise, and the increasing difficulties which will surround the Native land question as the population increases. It is a system of family tenure, but the “family” includes both near as well as distant connections, whose claims go back several generations.

Samoa is a tropical country which must be principally developed by the Natives, and I am convinced that the existing Native land laws or customs will retard its development, and therefore, in their own interests, as well as in the interests of the Territory, these laws should be changed. To change the system of land-tenure will be by far the most difficult problem in Samoa. Those interested in retaining the present system are the chiefs and leaders of the people. There are approximately 3,250 Matais in Samoa, whose influence is powerful, and who are very jealous of their rights to exercise authority over their lands, but meanwhile the young Samoans have no inducement to cultivate more land than is absolutely necessary to provide their limited needs and the needs of their Matais. If they create wealth for themselves, they must pass it on to others who are unwilling to increase their personal efforts beyond those necessary for their bare existence.

I have discussed this matter with the Faipules in the Native Council, and in order to interest them in the necessity for making a drastic change in the existing land system I arranged for a party of eight Faipules to visit Tonga last November, where, by the courtesy of Prince Tugi, the Prime Minister, they were shown around Tonga, and the working of the Tongan land laws was explained to them. These laws provide for the reservation of an area of land for each youth on reaching the age of sixteen years—8½ acres for plantation as well as a village site—both of which he has the use of for a very low rental during the period of his life.

Those Faipules who visited Tonga furnished reports to me which showed that they were all in favour of similar laws being adopted in Samoa. I now have to convince the whole of the Faipules and chiefs of Samoa of the advisability of making this change, after which I will endeavour to get the Fono of Faipules to agree to assimilate our laws to those of Tonga. This change will be a difficult and slow process, but I am confident that it can and should be done in the interests of the Natives themselves. This is well illustrated by the fact that in Tonga the production of copra is 13 cwt. per head of population, while in Samoa the amount produced by the Natives is 5½ cwt. per head, a fact which is reasonable to assume the Tongan land laws are partly accountable for.

I am pleased to report that the grievances to which I referred in my report last year regarding villages on the north coast of Upolu having insufficient land have been redressed, and areas have been allocated by the New Zealand Government from their Crown Estates for new village sites. Bush land has also been allocated where required for plantations.

LEGISLATION ON NATIVE AFFAIRS.

At the last Fono of Faipules (Native Government Council) the following Native regulations or by-laws were passed, and have since been published and circulated in book form to all villages in Samoa, as the *Tulafono mo Samoa i Sisifo* (Native Regulations for Western Samoa), viz.:—

1. Constitution and Functions of the Fono of Faipules.
2. Constitution and Functions of Native District Councils.
3. Constitution and Functions of Village Committees.
4. Cleaning of Villages.
5. Construction of New Model Villages.
6. Penalties for drinking or making Intoxicating Liquor.