

GILBERT AND ELLICE ISLANDS COLONY.

S. G.
Confidential.

Ocean Island,
19th January, 1930.

Sir,

With reference to the first paragraph of my confidential letter of the 6th January, I have the honour to submit the following report concerning the suitability for permanent settlement by the natives of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands of certain atolls in the Central Pacific, apart from those included in the Phoenix Group. As stated in previous correspondence, the Phoenix Islands are only capable of supporting an immediate population of about 750 while the number of natives anxious to emigrate is estimated to be not less than 3,500 Gilbertese and 130 Ellice Islanders. Even with intensive planting it will take 10 years or more before the Phoenix Islands can support their estimated maximum of 4 - 5,000 and by that time it is more than probable that the population of the Gilberts will have again risen and that yet more people will be anxious to migrate. It must be remembered, furthermore, that the settlers in the Phoenix Islands, given room for expansion, will multiply to an extent impossible on their home islands and that much of the land at present unplanted will be required for the offspring of the

The Acting Secretary to Government,
Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony,
Ocean Island.

of the first generation of settlers. It is, therefore, necessary to investigate the possibility of colonizing other islands in the Central Pacific area or, should they be already leased, of having some of our surplus labour employed on them.

The Line Islands Group.

2. Apart from the Phoenix Group and certain islands in the Cook Group, such as Nasseu and Suwarrow, which belong to New Zealand, the only atolls suitable for colonization purposes appear to be those comprising the group generally known since whaling ship days as the "Line Islands"; namely, Palmyra, Washington, Fanning, Christmas, Jarvis, Malden, Starbuck, Caroline, Vostok, and Flint Islands. Of this group Palmyra and Jarvis have now been claimed by the United States and the latter is, in any case, unsuitable for settlement. The five southern islands of the group are, I believe, the only islands now remaining under the jurisdiction of the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific which have not been included within the boundaries of a Colony or Protectorate, or under the Chief Magistrate of Pitcairn Island. These islands all lie in an almost direct line north and south of Fanning Island and within the same latitudes as the Gilbert and Ellice Groups. It is possible that His Honour might consider the desirability of making representations to His Excellency to have Malden, Starbuck, Caroline, Vostok, and Flint islands formally included within the boundaries of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony. These atolls fall logically within the Fanning Island District and while they have until recently been considered of little value it is submitted that they can be of very definite use to this Colony.

Colony. If not required for any other purpose they can be used for the settlement of our surplus population, while should they be at present leased as plantations they would form an outlet for the employment of Gilbertese or Ellice Island labour, the supply of which is always so greatly in excess of the demand. Whatever use was made of these islands the revenue obtained from them would form a welcome addition to the income of the Fanning Island District and could be used in reduction of the somewhat heavy taxation devolving on the Fanning and Washington Islands plantations and to defray the cost of maintaining a small schooner which is so needed for District Administration use in the Line Group. Apart from the benefits which jurisdiction over the southern Line Islands would confer on this Colony it might not be out of place here to stress the fact that the recent annexation of Howland, Baker, and Jarvis Islands would appear to show that Islands hitherto considered to be part of the High Commission Territories are liable to be claimed by other countries unless they are included, as the Phoenix Islands have now been, within the boundaries of some Colony.

3. The following brief notes deal with the eight Islands mentioned above from the point of view of their suitability for colonization -

Fanning Island.

This Island, together with Washington, is owned by Messrs. Burns, Philp and Co., Ltd. During the course of a recent interview in Suva with His Excellency, Mr. James Burns, the Chairman of Directors of the Company, stated that they

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that they would welcome the permanent settlement of Gilbertese on Fanning and Washington Islands as a possible solution of their labour difficulties. Mr. B. Fairfax Ross, one of the Company's plantation inspectors, suggested that an area of 500 acres at present held as a cable reserve could be allotted to the settlers. It was admitted at the time that this was not good coconut land but Mr. Fairfax Ross suggested that it was better than much land in the Gilbert Group. From information contained in a subsequent report by Mr. Fairfax Ross it would appear, however, that the land is very second rate. The following excerpts from page 12 of the report deal with this area -

"The writer went most thoroughly over these areas, and with the exception of a narrow strip along the borders, struck phosphate rock and hardpan strata, generally within 2'0" of the surface.

The past experience of planting highland on Fanning Island has been so unsuccessful, that straightout planting could not be entertained with any reasonable possibility of success. If, however, the rock strata were broken through, results might be more encouraging, but at the same time, even with this precaution, these areas could only be classed as definitely secondary coconut land.

The rock strata vary from several inches to several feet in thickness, and it would seem that the cost of developing under these conditions, i.e. breaking through the rock and hardpan strata, could never be economically entertained, particularly with this labour.

A great deal of money has been lost in useless planting here in the past, and again the writer advances the theory that natural groves established themselves where ever the land was suitable."

On page 4 Mr. Fairfax Ross states that these phosphate rock and hardpan areas "commenced with a very prolific yield, but at 10 years old were almost non-bearing and shortly finished".

4. I would respectfully urge that the government should only sanction a settlement scheme on this land after
the most

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the most careful investigation as to whether it really is capable of supporting a native population. It is suggested that in the first instance the Acting Administrative Officer, Fanning Island District, could go over the whole area with the Gilbertese already on Fanning Island and obtain their views as to the suitability of the land, the estimated number it could support, the nearness of a good water supply, etc.

At the same time it is urged that, in view of the fact that the Company will save some thousands of pounds in recruiting costs should a party of Gilbertese become permanent residents on Fanning, strong representations should be made to Messrs. Burns, Philp to provide an area of good planted coconut land for the colonists. The Company employs at present 50 indentured labourers, so a permanent colony of 70 to 80 adult males with their families should be sufficient to supply them with the labour they require. It is suggested that the Company should be invited, as a condition of the government sponsoring the settlement scheme, to provide an area of planted land sufficient to give a block of not less than 150 bearing coconut trees to each adult male and his wife. This would require the alienation of only 21,000 to 24,000 of the 140,000 bearing trees on the estate and the Company would still be able to make a substantial profit on the copra purchased from the colonists. In view of the fact that the last recruiting trip cost 80,500 for the charter of the ship alone the above scheme would appear to be very definitely to the Company's advantage and at the same time an equitable one from the point of view of the colonists.

5. In any case, irrespective of the actual scheme
under consideration,

under consideration, it is respectfully suggested that this Colony should insist on the following safeguards as the minimum conditions on which it will consent to any proposal -

- (1) The colonists must be given holdings of sufficient size to maintain themselves quite apart from any employment which they may succeed in obtaining from the Company;
- (2) The land should be given to them freehold;
- (3) The colonists should have free access to the lagoon and to a convenient supply of fresh water.

Without these safeguards the lot of the native would be worse in his new home than on his former island as he would be a semi-landless exile, dependant for at any rate part of his food on a monopoly which owned and controlled everything on his island, and deprived of the protection given by law to indentured labour. Should, however, these conditions be accepted Fanning Island would appear to offer a most desirable outlet for the surplus population of the Gilbert Group and should provide a good home for about 300 - 350 men, women, and children. It has been suggested, in my confidential memorandum of the 18th January, that this island should be reserved for settlement by members of the Catholic faith.

Washington Island.

6. Mr. Fairfax Ross stated, in the course of the above-mentioned discussion, that he thought that land could be made available for native settlers on Washington Island also. This would presumably be planted land, for on page 12 of his report on Washington Island Mr. Ross refers to the unplanted

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the unplanted areas as follows -

"This comprises areas as under:-

Undeveloped	260	
Peat	<u>444</u>	713 acres.

The greater part of the undeveloped area comprises swamp, high land of rock rim, and phosphate deposits, and in the writer's opinion, wholly unsuitable for further coconut culture. This is supported by the fact that over the course of many years, palms have established themselves in natural groves where ever the soil was suitable. Some years ago an attempt was made to plant the peat bog, and it is not surprising that it was an entire failure. The peat areas can be condemned without hesitation."

From this statement it would appear that the unplanted areas on Washington are quite unsuitable for settlement.

7. The same remarks with regard to safeguards and conditions apply with equal force in the case of Washington as of Fanning Island but, subject to these, it is suggested that Washington Island is an even more desirable field for immigration. It would appear that Washington is the most suitable island in this Colony for the settlement of Ellice Islanders, as it is the most fertile and will grow all the food plants to which they are accustomed while possessing, at the same time, some of the amenities of civilization, such as a trade store. At present 70 labourers are employed on Washington Island and it is suggested that the settlement of about 85 families should meet the labour requirements of the company and at the same time provide a home for every Ellice Islander who desires to migrate. This would necessitate the alienation of only 25,500 trees out of the estimated 200,000 bearing trees on the estate and should prove a good business proposition for the Company, especially in view of the fact that they will still be able to make an indirect profit from the alienated area.

Christmas Island.

Christmas Island.

8. Judging from published accounts, there can be little doubt that no other island in this Colony, or probably in the whole Pacific, is so pre-eminently suitable for colonization as Christmas. I would refer you to the standard work on the island, "The Christmas", published in 1914; to articles in the Mid-Pacific Magazine for March, 1915 and June, 1925; and to the excellent monograph by Christophersen on the "Vegetation of Pacific Equatorial Islands". The only criticism that I have heard concerning the suitability of this island is that it is subject to droughts. It is true that variability of rainfall is characteristic of the island but it would not appear that drought periods are more severe or frequent than in the Central Gilbert Islands. The oldest coconut trees show only two drought periods since they were planted and the fact that there are at present, in spite of irregular planting, nearly 300,000 trees on the island, as compared with 200,000 on Washington and 140,000 on Fanning Island, testifies to the suitability of the climate and soil for coconut cultivation. During a visit to the island in 1912, Father Emil Rougler stated that he had "no difficulty in getting fresh water for drinking in any place. We never had to dig more than 12 inches, picking of course the lowest places". The Whippoorwill Expedition, which visited Christmas Island in 1924, during a dry period, found the water level in the wells at the main settlement to be 5 feet below the surface, or about the same as in the Gilbert Islands.

9. During the course of the recent expedition to the Phoenix Group I was approached by native delegations, both
in the

In the Gilbert and Ellice Groups, who earnestly desired that His Excellency the High Commissioner should be made aware of the fact that, while they were grateful to be allowed a chance to emigrate to any locality, the unanimous desire of the people was to be permitted, if possible, to colonize Christmas Island. Subsequent investigations have inclined me to the opinion that the colonization of Christmas is the ideal solution of the whole problem of over-population both in the Gilbert and Ellice Groups. The island has at the moment about 300,000 coconut trees and it has been estimated that 60,000 acres could be planted, an area which would provide for about 3,000,000 trees. From this it would appear that Christmas Island could, at the present moment, support every Gilbertese and Ellice Islander who desires to emigrate; while, if it were fully planted, it could, if these figures are correct, maintain the entire population of the Colony.

10. The advantages of settling all the surplus population in the Colony on one island are very real. Christmas Island is no less than 35 miles long on the southern side, with an average width of 35 miles. It covers an area of 740,000 acres, of which more than 200,000 acres is available land. The island is thus very large indeed and would maintain extensive colonies of both Gilbertese and Ellice Islanders without the possibility of any friction developing between them. The number of settlers would result in a correspondingly large revenue both from the copra tax and from import and export duties; this would justify the establishment of a District headquarters with an Administrative Officer resident on the island. The considerable volume of trade centred on the one island would lead to the establishment of traders' stores and would ensure the maintenance

the maintenance of comparatively frequent shipping communication with the outside world. In short, Christmas Island would appear to lack every one of the defects of the Phoenix Islands mentioned in my previous report and, at the same time, to possess no known ones of its own.

11. It is respectfully recommended, therefore, that every endeavour should be made to acquire rights over Christmas Island, if necessary by purchase. It would surely be hard to find a more desirable investment for the surplus funds of this Colony than the purchase of this island, which would bring in interest not only in terms of human welfare and happiness but also in a greatly increased annual revenue. Should it not be practicable to acquire rights over Christmas by agreement with the owners, resumption, or purchase, it is respectfully urged that at any rate it might be possible to insist on the employment of Gilbertese or Ellice Island labour on the island. The almost pathetic eagerness of the natives of this Colony to obtain employment is a feature of every recruiting meeting. It is a common sight for hundreds of able-bodied natives to besiege the recruiting table when the number who can be taken can be counted on one's fingers. While, therefore, the situation in this Colony is almost unique among the Pacific Groups in that the supply of labour so greatly exceeds the demand, our natives are under a handicap in so much as they are prevented from competing in the labour market outside this Colony, while foreign nationals are able to enter and do work which the Gilbertese and Ellice Islanders are well qualified to perform.

Malden Island.

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Malden Island.

12. This island, discovered by Byron in 1825, was for many years leased to a Guano Company. It is at present uninhabited. The most reliable published information concerning the island is contained in Emory's monograph on the "Archaeology of the Pacific Equatorial Islands". From this and other sources it is clear that the island was inhabited in former times and carried a population of between 100 and 200 persons. The average annual rainfall from 1890 to 1918 was 25.27 inches, falling on 82 days a year; there being 7 ancient wells on the island. It would appear that there is at any rate a possibility that the island could support a small population and it might repay a visit of inspection.

Starbuck Island.

13. Starbuck Island is about $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles long, some 3 miles wide at its widest part, and 15 feet high. I have no information as to whether water has been found there or whether any attempt has been made to grow coconuts. The vegetation is, however, reported to be very scanty and from the account given in Arundel's monograph on the "Phoenix Group and other Islands of the Pacific" it would appear to resemble a large edifice of Enderbury or one of the other more arid islands in the northern Phoenix Group. It might, however, be worth a visit as, owing to its size, it should be able to support a comparatively large population if any food trees could be induced to grow.

Caroline Island.

14. Caroline Island is ideally suited for permanent colonization by either Gilbertese or Ellice Islanders. It is about

is about 7 miles long by 1 mile and consists of 36 islets encircling a lagoon. The atoll is fertile and even now contains some 30,000 coconut trees. It is conjectured that the island could, at the present moment, support some 300 natives, a number which could be gradually increased should the islets be not yet fully planted.

Vostok Island.

15. It has, unfortunately, been impossible to obtain any detailed information with regard to this island locally. It is believed, however, to be very fertile and to have been well planted. Like Caroline Island it should, therefore, be able to support a permanent population of several hundred.

Flint Island.

16. Flint Island is about 3 miles long by $\frac{1}{2}$ a mile wide. It is believed to contain about 30,000 coconut trees at the present moment and to be very fertile. On a tree basis the island should support not less than 300 natives, as the yield per tree is high. Stewart's "Handbook of the Pacific Islands", however, gives the copra production to be about 250 tons per annum, which is $2\frac{1}{2}$ times the present combined output of Hull and Sydney Islands in the Phoenix Group. On this basis the island should support a population of 1,000 or more.

17. It is understood that Caroline, Vostok, and Flint Islands are at the moment leased to S.E. Maxwell and Co., of Tahiti and that Tahitian labour is exclusively employed on the islands. It might be possible, however, to negotiate with the company for the resumption of the remainder of the lease, as

lease, as the three islands together could support a considerable population. Failing this, it might be possible to insist on the employment of British labour on the islands.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

(Signed). H. E. Maude.

Commissioner for Native Lands,

Gilbert Islands.

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Confidential.

19th January, 1938.

MEMORANDUM.

From:-

To:-

The Commissioner for Native Lands,
Gilbert Islands,
at Ocean Island.

The Acting Secretary to Government,
Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony,
Ocean Island.

Assignment of separate islands in the Phoenix
Group to the adherents of the Protestant
and Catholic Missions.

I regret that this question was not dealt with in my confidential letter of the 6th January as His Excellency's confidential despatch of the 8th December was not received until after the submission of my report.

2. There can be little doubt that the principle of allotting separate islands to the adherents of the different Missions is an excellent one. Its application to the present scheme of settlement in the Phoenix Group presents, however, grave difficulties, in view of the fact that there are only two islands, Hull and Sydney, suitable for immediate occupation and the population of the more land-hungry islands in the Gilbert Group is overwhelmingly Protestant. In this connection I would refer you to para. 9 of my letter No. 11 of the 19th November in which it is stated that "the greatest measure of over-population and 'land-hunger' exists on the islands of Beru, Arorae, Onotoa, and Nikunau, in that order".

The following

The following table, taken from the latest Census, shows the Catholic and Non-Catholic population on each of these Islands:-

	<u>Non-Catholic.</u>	<u>Catholic.</u>
Beru -	1,821	404
Arorae -	1,450	-
Onotoa -	1,453	175
Nikunau -	1,365	300
<u>Total -</u>	<u>6,089</u>	<u>879</u>

3. On the island of Beru, furthermore, the local Catholic father has, it is understood, taken the view that a Catholic who emigrates from Beru is guilty of a moral sin against his church. This view is not, I believe, taken by the father on any other island; on Onotoa, for example, the father has expressed himself as being enthusiastically in favour of the migration scheme. Nevertheless, any Catholic who migrates from Beru will do so against the express orders of his father and will presumably cease to be a member of the church. It is probable, therefore, that the four or five Catholic families who may desire to emigrate from Beru will join the Protestant church.

4. Even if certain other islands are brought into the scheme, as recommended in para. 13 of my confidential letter of the 6th January, the Catholics would still only be entitled to provide 118 settlers (including women and children) out of the 750 which it is estimated that Hull and Sydney islands can support. This calculation is based on the proportion which the Catholic population bears to the Non-Catholic on each island. It would be clearly unfair, and would be

and would be recognized as such by the natives, to hand over either Hull or Sydney Islands for settlement by Catholics only, since it would mean that, in order to fill up the numbers from the small Catholic population, a comparatively rich class of Catholic would have to be taken while far poorer Protestants would be turned down purely on account of their religious belief.

5. It is therefore recommended that, in view of the fact that there is room in the Phoenix Group for such a limited number of settlers and that only two islands can be colonized at present, it is not practicable to reserve an entire island for the adherents of the Catholic Mission. In connection with the scheme of emigration to the Line Islands it is, however, being recommended elsewhere that investigations should be made with regard to the possibility of settling some 340 Ellice Islanders (85 families) on Washington Island, as it is impossible to allot a separate island in the Phoenix Group to these natives either, and some 320 Gilbertese (80 families) on Fanning Island. A small island capable of supporting an ultimate population of some 300 to 400 would appear to be exactly what is required for the Catholics and I would suggest that Fanning Island should be assigned to Catholics only for settlement purposes. Should this be done it is recommended that Hull and Sydney Islands should be reserved for settlement by Protestants only.

6. Failing this it might be desirable to allot Hull Island for settlement by the Protestants of Beru, leaving Sydney Island for settlement by both Catholics and Protestants from the other islands. In some five years, when Gardner and Canton Islands may be expected to be ready for colonization,

colonization, Gardner will in all probability become an entirely Protestant island, if it is to be settled, as recommended, by the natives of Arorae and Onotoa; while it is possible that a few Catholics may desire to settle on Canton, which would thus fall into the same category as Sydney Island.

(Signed). H. E. Maude.
