

APPENDIX 9

QUOTATIONS CONCERNING EPIDEMIC DISEASE ON ANEITYUM
1830-1848

1. GEDDIE, Journal, July 13th 1848 (MR, February 1850:24)

Concerning teachers Peter and Simeona, Peter had previously fled to Aneityum from Tanna early in 1846, Simeona was stationed on Aneityum in June 1842.

At one time their fears for their personal safety were excited. A fatal epidemic had broken out and raged throughout the length and breadth of the island. Now a general impression prevails throughout many of these islands that foreigners, and especially Missionaries, are the cause of disease. About this time a party of Tannese visited Aneiteum, and urged the people to kill the teachers, in order that they might get rid of the disease.

Geddie, like Gill (1856), appears to have confused the 1842 epidemic with the flight of the teachers from Tanna to Aneityum in early 1846.

2. C. HARDIE, 'Account of the native teacher John Griffin', 1851 (MR, February 1852:23).

Written at Malua Institution, Upolu, Samoa. 'John Griffin' is Simeona, settled at Aneityum June 1842, at Epeke. He was at Upolu in 1851.

... in 1842 he was sent with the brethren Turner, Nisbet, and Heath, to Tanna, to be employed by them in the commencement of the mission there. About three weeks after the brethren landed on Tanna, they ascertained that the teachers who had been left on the island of Aneiteum, on a previous voyage of the missionary vessel [1841], had, on account of the difficulties with which they had had to contend, deserted their post on that island. The subject of the present sketch, and another, were immediately selected by the brethren and appointed to re-occupy the abandoned station... They succeeded in settling among the people at the station which had been left, and soon felt so secure as to be able to commence building a house for themselves, and to make attempts at instructing the people. But before the house was finished the island was visited by a very severe epidemic, during which many died, and among them one of the teachers and his wife. As the people of the land had the superstitious notion that their own sacred men and foreigners, especially foreign teachers, whom they regard as sacred men, cause diseases, they assembled with clubs and spears, for the purpose of killing the survivors of the little mission family, to make what they call a mourning feast. In this instance the lives of the teachers were saved by an influential, lame, old chief, who had formed an attachment to them.

3. INGLIS, article 'New Hebrides-Aneiteum' (RPM, August 1855:274)

Written between April and July 1854:

About twelve years ago, a most fatal epidemic appeared on this island, and, I believe, extended to other islands of the group. From the description given of it by the natives, it appears to have been dysentery. Great numbers died, and the survivors were so weakened, that in many cases they could not consign the dead to the sea, - their mode of disposing of the dead in the days of heathenism; they were left in the houses where they died. The population seems to have been considerably reduced before the epidemic disappeared.

4. W. GILL (1856)

a. Pages 135-6, concerning Futuna:

Early, however, in the year 1845, most of the islands in this group were visited, very generally, with an epidemic, which proved fatal in its consequences; great numbers of the natives died, and the people of Fotuna suffered alike with their neighbours...

The epidemic actually occurred in 1842 (cf. McArthur and Yaxley, 1967:10).

b. Concerning Aneityum between June 1842 and September 1846, pages 153-4:

During the long absence of the mission ship, much sickness had prevailed among the tribes; all the teachers had, more or less, suffered, - and some of their families had died [1842]. Whilst in the midst of this affliction, a party of refugee native Christian teachers, driven by persecution and death from the island of Tana [early in 1846], came to their brethren on Aneiteum. Their defeat on Tanna gave boldness to the heathen party on Aneiteum, who availed themselves of the prevailing epidemic to excite the populace, so as to raise a persecution so desperate and so continued that the teachers were compelled to retire from the settlements to an uninhabited and barren part of the country...

5. J. COPELAND, article 'Moral History of an Inhabitant of Aneiteum' (RPM, August 1858:245)

Concerning the Samoan teachers on Aneityum:

The progress in 1846 was not proportioned to the instrumentality employed. A reaction took place owing to the prevalence of sickness and death. On Tanna these evils were traced to the presence of the teachers and efforts were made to put them to death. They fled to Aneiteum, but the cruel Tannese followed them thither, and stirred up the Aneiteumese...

This information is probably from Geddie or Gill, again 1842 and 1846 events are mixed up.

6. WILLIAMU, Letter, September 20th 1860 (Inglis, 1890:322)

Written while Williamu on visit to Great Britain, to Mrs. Snodgrass, Castle Douglas:

Formerly there were two great epidemics on Aneityum. I saw the one, but I did not see the other. Around the whole island the people died; they fell like the leaves from off the trees; old men, and men in the prime of life, and young men and women, and big boys; but there were no little boys or infants died. We performed heathen rites over them for a while, and threw them into the sea; but we became so weak that we could not carry away the bodies, and there was no wailing, and no tears were shed, and we ceased to observe those customs by which we showed honour to the dead, the people in the land had become so few.

7. INGLIS, Address in Glasgow, Scotland, 27th September 1861 (RPM, November 1861:350)

One of the most intelligent of my teachers on Aneityum has oftener than once remarked to me, in reference to the epidemic that passed over the island about 19 years ago, that God at that time took away the chief opposers of the gospel. "A number of the chiefs," he said, "used to beat us boys, and threatened to kill us, if we went to the Samoan and Rarotongan teachers, and we durst go to them only at night; but God sent the sickness, and these men all died.

[Also published in HFR, December 1861:329]. The teacher referred to was probably Williamu.

8. INGLIS, Letter, July 19th 1867 (RPM, December 1867:448)

It is now 38 years since the first ship held communication with the shores of Aneityum. Up till that time there is no tradition, that I know of, of any epidemic having ever visited the island: the natives were living in a normal condition; a long experience had taught them the rude outlines of the laws of health and the causes of disease, as applied to their circumstances. The island was populous; and the most of the available land under cultivation. The population could not be less than 12,000; some have thought that it might be 20,000. Between the time the island was first visited by foreign vessels and the introduction of Christianity by the location of teachers, in 1841, a fearful epidemic swept over the island, and carried off at least one third of the population. Between the location of the teachers and the settlement of missionaries, in 1848, another epidemic, equally severe, passed over the island. How these epidemics originated we know not, but as there were none before white men visited these islands, the probability is they were imported. In 1861 the measles were brought by trading vessels, and a third of the population again perished.

[also published in HFR, January 1868:17]

9. J.L. BRENCHLEY (1873:196)

Visit in 1865, information from Inglis (McArthur, 1974:94)

Three fearful epidemics have visited the island within the last forty years. About the year 1836, an epidemic like cholera carried off above one-third of the population; about 1842 a similar one took off another third; and in 1861 a third epidemic of measles, followed by dysentery, scourged what was left... Previous to the first of the epidemics I have mentioned, the population, it is said, could not have been less than 12,000.

10. INGLIS (1890:177-8)

There is good reason for believing that sixty years ago the population on Aneityum was at least 12,000. Some have estimated it as high as 20,000; but two terribly alarming epidemics reduced it to less than a third of that number. Samoan teachers were first placed on Aneityum in 1841. It was a few years before the settlement of those teachers that the first epidemic appeared, probably about 1837 or 1838; and it was some time after their settlement, probably 1844 or 1845, that the second epidemic broke out. Both epidemics seem to have been of the nature of cholera. We never could learn anything as to their origin or cause. The mortality was so great that the living could not dispose of the dead, which they did at that time by tying stones to their feet and casting the bodies into the sea. No doubt the epidemic was aggravated by the putrefying corpses. We arrived at our conclusions respecting the extent of the mortality in these epidemics in this way. In the first years of the mission, Mr. Geddie and I made a circuit of the island annually; in each of these visits we spent about a week. We were always accompanied by a party of at least twenty or thirty of the principal Christian natives. At every school-house we held a religious service, at which the natives, as well as the missionaries, gave addresses. We also sent deputations to the heathen to speak to them at their own homes. Both at the two principal stations, and at four other important stations, as we had with us the most intelligent and best informed men on the island, we took down the names of all the men who had died at these places respectively during both the first and second epidemics; and making allowance for a fair proportion of women and children, we calculated that fully 4000 people must have died during each of the epidemics. No doubt those fearful scourges so affected the general health as largely to account for the subsequent decrease of the population; a large proportion of the land was thrown out of cultivation, and a large amount of swamp land, instead of being finely cultivated food-producing gardens, fell into stagnant marshes, largely increasing the fever-producing malaria.