

The 1918 Influenza Epidemic in Sāmoa and the Sāmoa Church (LMS)

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Abstract

Under the leadership of New Zealand, nearly twenty percent of the population of Sāmoans living in Western Samoa died from the influenza epidemic of 1918. According to the Sāmoan Epidemic Commission report, New Zealand failed in their leadership role to protect the island population. As an infectious disease, the influenza could have easily spread throughout Upolu and Savai'i by mere contact with the infected. In early November, the LMS was engaged in its monthly collection or taulaga. As John McLane describes the events, "Leaving Apia several days after the arrival of the influenza, London Missionary Society (LMS) ministers worked their way sixty miles west to Mulifanua, gathering funds and likely spreading illness in their wake" (McLane 2013: 187). The same traveling party (malaga) was going on in other districts at around this time. Without putting the blame on the Sāmoan Church (LMS), this paper looks at the possible role of the Church in the rapid spread of the disease due to the financial offering (taulaga), and examines the terrible impact of the epidemic on the leadership of both the government (malō) and Sāmoan Church (LMS) at that time.

Keywords: influenza, Sāmoan Church, London Missionary Society, taulaga, New Zealand

Introduction

The German Empire in the Pacific collapsed at the beginning of the First World War. Rather than relying on British or African colonial troops to take over German territories, as in Africa, in the Pacific, British Crown's settler colonies achieved the confiscations (Hempenstall 1978). South Africa took over South West Africa, while Australia and New Zealand occupied German colonies in the South Pacific (Henderson 1993). New Zealand seized Apia, Western Samoa on 30 August 1914, and on the first of September, the Union Jack replaced the German flag. In addition to Samoa, the Allies occupied the region's coaling stations and telegraph installations. The Western Sāmoan Islands slowly experienced a new era of control by a new colonial power different from the previous power in leadership, language, tactics, and laws. The different administrations had one leadership quality in common, both governed the Sāmoan people autocratically.

The island's takeover occurred with no previous treaty or formal discussions. The islands' occupation revealed a new era of control, and the former German "pearl of the south seas" became an official mandate of New Zealand in 1919, five years after the start of the Great War. As patriotic subjects of the British Empire, New Zealanders successfully hoisted the Empire's flag in Western Samoa without bloodshed. On August 1914, the German Governor Dr. Erich Schultz greeted Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Logan of New Zealand, and the peaceful handing over of power became the first time the Empire sent a British Dominion overseas to capture a foreign territory (Smith 1924). Rather than drastically changing the governing tactics right away, Logan maintained German Governor Solf's strategy and "guided" Sāmoans by relying on chiefly (*matai*) authority to uphold the existing government. The new administration occupied the Sāmoan Islands as a jurisdiction on a "caretaker basis" before the League of Nations' official mandate system in 1919.

The First World War ended in 1918, and no bloodshed occurred in Samoa. However, the reality of death came in another form. Four days before the Armistice, on 7 November 1918, the SS *Talune* docked in Apia harbor from Auckland, via Suva and carried passengers that suffered from the worldwide influenza epidemic. The so-called 'Spanish' Flu swept the globe during the Great War's end, across Africa, Europe, America to China and eventually reached Australia and New Zealand and

killed millions of people worldwide. The epidemic became a transformative period for Samoa that would later fuel a unified dissent toward New Zealand (*Samoa Times* 1919).

On 31 October 1918, the *Talune* had received a “clean bill of health” and then set sail from Auckland to Suva, Levuka, and Apia carrying passengers infected with influenza to Fiji, Western Samoa, Tonga and Nauru with the following death tolls: five percent of the Fiji population, six percent of the Tongan population, and 16 percent of Nauru’s population. Based on the *Sāmoan Epidemic Commission* report (Elliot et al. 1919), at the time when the *Talune* docked in Apia, at least six of the passengers had influenza with certain members of the crew as “unwell” and Fijian laborers were “sick.” There were three passengers labeled as “seriously affected.”

The entrance of the *Talune* into the waters of Western Samoa would prove a drastic act of negligence on the part of New Zealand. Sandra Tomkins (1992: 187) claims that Logan learned of the disease when “he read the newspapers brought by the ship.” There was no doubt that New Zealand had suffered from the epidemic, and unfortunately, New Zealand failed to inform Samoa with some form of a radio or telegraph wire. Also, the Public Health Department and the Defense Department “failed in its duty in ignoring the fact that New Zealand was . . . responsible for the welfare of the inhabitants of these islands, both European and Native” (Elliot et al. 1919: 7). No medical precautions were taken, and the New Zealand Administration in Samoa was not informed of the infected ship headed towards the Pacific Islands. On the 6th of November 1918, New Zealand had declared the influenza as a “notifiable disease by Proclamation,” (Elliot et al. 1919: 6). This was one day before the arrival of the ship to the shores of Samoa.

American Samoa successfully escaped the influenza epidemic because the U.S. Naval Commander, John M. Poyer, informed of the risk by telegraph, issued a strict maritime quarantine to the islands of American Samoa (McLane 2013). Leading *matai* of American Samoa received orders from Poyer to not accept any boats from Upolu and to undertake a careful medical examination of incoming ships. Habitual family interactions between the two islands ceased for some years until the epidemic came under control. A patrol system comprised of American Sāmoans together with the few American soldiers on the island with the cooperation of the local leaders “was so unstinting that the governor recommended to President Wilson that three of them be presented with medals” (Crosby 1989: 238).

At one point, Poyer offered medical assistance to Logan with multiple attempts to contact the New Zealand Administration. Unfortunately, Logan ordered “the radio station to break off all radio communications with American Samoa immediately” (Hiery 1995: 174). Logan expressed aggravation toward Poyer when a boat sent to American Samoa to retrieve mail was denied access until “after five days of absolute quarantine”(Crosby 1989: 237). Crosby claims, “Presumably it was this return of the mail boat that so aggravated Logan that he temporarily broke the radio link with Pago Pago” (Crosby 1989: 237). J. W. Davidson supports the previous claim and writes, “The telegram had been shown to Logan; but he had taken no action and had said later that he had thought the offer of assistance was to the consul’s sick wife and not to the country” (Davidson 1967: 95).

The epidemic took a heavy toll on Western Samoa. Its population on the 30th of September 1918 was approximately 38,302, an increase of 5,487 since 1902. The December 1918 census, after the influenza, recorded the Sāmoan population at 30,738, revealing a decrease of 2,077, or a total loss of almost 20 percent of the Western Samoa population (Elliot et al. 1919: 4). As a result of the

horrific deaths in Samoa, the New Zealand Government established the Epidemic Commission to investigate the cause of Sāmoan deaths. The commission concluded that the New Zealand Government failed to notify Logan about the worldwide epidemic, and the overall handling of the situation in Samoa resulted in a “general administrative failure.” Furthermore, the 1919 *Sāmoan Epidemic Commission* concluded the following:

In our opinion, there is no doubt whatever that epidemic pneumonic influenza was introduced into Western Samoa by the SS “Talune” on the 7th November, 1918, Samoa time (8th November, New Zealand time) (Elliot et al. 1919: 4).

The effect of the epidemic on Sāmoan society and its hierarchical leadership resulted in immediate, drastic changes in *fa’asamoa* and the government (*malō*). Within the Sāmoan *malō*, out of the thirty *Fono a Faipule* (House of Representatives), only six survived, nearly 45 percent of *matai* or titled members of an average Sāmoan family (*‘aiga*) died. On Savai’i, at the beginning of 1919, only 755 of 1,486 *matai* survived. The leadership of families devolved to young and inexperienced men, and as Herman Hiery puts it, “At a stroke, a new generation moved into position of responsibility” (Hiery 1995: 174). Furthermore, the government witnessed a new breed of leaders forced to take control of the family, government, and church responsibilities. The process of choosing new leadership took time and *matai* titles remained vacant because the process of *talatalaga* or family deliberation with different heirs (*suli*) to titles took time, especially the resources needed for a grand ceremony (Meleisea 1987). The epidemiological induced event caused drastic changes in Sāmoan leadership within the families and churches.

The LMS suffered a significant loss of pastors and elders during the influenza epidemic. As specified by Rev. Normal Goodall, “out of 220 pastors in active service, 103 died. Twenty-nine out of thirty members of the ‘*Au Toeaina* or Council of Elders—all experienced leaders of the Church—were amongst the casualties” (Goodall 1954: 361–362). Interestingly, the “elite” experienced a higher percentage of casualties than the general public. Samoa witnessed changes on all fronts of its civil society, and the new leadership received power and position without proper *tautua* (service). As reported by Rev. Paul Cane, “I have heard that in the sub-district of Savai’i all pastors are dead [so] I am going to go all around the island to fix up things as best I can.” (Cane to Lenwood 1918). The epidemic’s effects caused significant loss to the theological college at Malua. Rev. Hough recorded a total of seventeen students or future pastors, along with a couple of tutors, who lost their lives to the illness. One student “went mad and tried to drown himself,” Rev. Hough stated in a report to the Foreign Secretary of the LMS (Hough to Lenwood 1918). The following year Rev. Faletose, Secretary of the LMS General Assembly, listed the actual numbers of deceased teachers and pastors of the LMS totaling 747 (Faletose to ‘Au Matutua 1919). Unfortunately, mass graves up to 500 people each became normal in Samoa at the time (Faletose to ‘Au Matutua 1919). Similarly, to the situation with government *Faipule* leaders and *fa’asamoa* with the lack of leaders, the LMS European leadership feared a rise of inexperienced Sāmoan pastors to lead the Church. The *LMS Report* of 1919 addressed this issue and stated, “But the problem which concerns us is whether we have faith in the young people, for it is the young and untried who will immediately be forced to take in hand the guidance of the Church” (*Hundred and Twenty-Fourth Report* 1919). The Secretary of the Sāmoan District Church, Rev. Hough looked to the LMS high school Leulumoega to take up new leadership roles in families and the church (Hough to Lenwood 1919). The LMS feared that all aspects of the missionary work would suffer, from missionaries in the field to a dearth of potential candidates to carry on the work of the Gospel.

The three institutional pillars of Samoa, government, church, and *fa'asamoa*, experienced an unfortunate setback and disappointment that left Sāmoans ambivalent about the future. In the biography of Samoa's famed part-Sāmoan hotelier Aggie Grey, the author writes, "A generation of chiefs, orators, and grandmothers rich in oral lore had been wiped out before they could transmit their treasures" (Alailima 1988: 153). Despite the traumatic shock of the event, the Sāmoan population proved resilient and proactive with more vocal resentment toward New Zealand. The Sāmoan people wanted answers and "laid their complaints before the Governor" (Hough to Hawkins 1919). In the opinion of Rev. Hough, the resentment was so high that Sāmoans wished "either to be governed as a crown colony or to be handed over to the United States of America" (Hough to Hawkins 1919).

Who was to blame?

Without a doubt, Sāmoans were victims to this cruel disease that killed thousands. The *Sāmoan Epidemic Commission* placed the entire blame on New Zealand Administrators for failing to properly medically clear the *SS Talune*. The source of the influenza is uncertain, however, there are multiple likely theories of how the disease quickly spread throughout Western Samoa.

As the statistics show, the impact of the "foreign" epidemic was immense. Without doubt, the Sāmoans on the ship contracted the disease and when they were met on arrival by their relatives, they returned to their villages and taking the infection with them. Rev. Hough describes in his letter that passengers from the infected ship scattered throughout the islands and "in a week the whole population of Western Samoa was prostrate with the disease" (Hough to Lenwood 1919). John McLane (2013) mentioned that when people became ill, it was customary for family and friends to visit the sick. That generosity based on family relationships might have played another role in the spread of the disease. Even the design of the traditional Sāmoan *fale* (house) with the lowered woven walls were blamed because of the poor ventilation (McLane 2013). The *Sāmoan Epidemic Commission Report* concluded that in seven days after the arrival of the infected ship the disease "spread with amazing rapidity throughout Upolu, and later throughout Savai'i. By the end of two months approximately 7,542 persons died (Elliot et al. 1919). *Fa'asamoa* (Sāmoan chiefly systems, traditions, and way of life) was not to be blamed, nor was the lifestyles of the people, rather, the close relationships and practices of the culture could have played a role in the spread of the influenza. Despite efforts to contain this disease, there is no guaranteed success to quarantine.

Another possible agency in the transmission of infection that that has been given little attention so far by historians, was the role of the LMS Church during their collection of *taulaga* (offering). This paper is not a critique of the LMS but rather an historical analysis of how the influenza in Samoa spread so rapidly, given the very limited means of communication at the time. There were few roads; travel outside the main planation areas of Northwest Upolu was by pathways on foot or on horseback, or by sea, in long boats. The role of the LMS requires contextualization in the history of the LMS Church since 1915 to show how the LMS might have unknowingly assisted the spread of the 1918 influenza epidemic in Western Samoa. This possibility was first mentioned by Newton Rowe, author of *Samoa Under the Sailing Gods*. As specified by Rowe, the LMS continued with their annual donation cycle of *taulaga* during the month of November. Traveling from Apia to Mulinu'u, it is likely that the process of meeting the financial goals of the church may have led to the spreading of the disease. McLane supports this theory by stating,

In early November, the LMS was engaged in its annual donation cycle, where individuals and villages would compete to donate the greatest amount to the church. Leaving Apia several days after the arrival of the influenza, LMS ministers worked their way sixty miles west to Mulifanua, gathering funds and likely spreading illness in their wake (McLane 2013: 187–188).

This claim is not mentioned in any of the reports given by the *Sāmoan Epidemic Commission*, New Zealand Government, nor London Missionary Society. Inquiry and interviews into the epidemic by Sāmoan representatives or Europeans make no mention of this claim. However, Rowe based his assertion on “[his] claims to have heard from several sources after his arrival in Western Samoa” (McLane 2013: 187). Was this mere hearsay and idle talk against the LMS, or did it actually occur? It is important to historically examine LMS archival material during this period to see whether there are any correlations.

In a 10 July 1919 issue of the *Marlborough Express*, the LMS missionary Rev. Paul Cane, was on the *SS Talune* and was infected with the influenza. Logan blamed Cane for not informing the medical officer about his illness, and as a result, “Sāmoans travelling on the ship from Fiji contracted the disease from the Rev. Mr. Cane or some other infected passenger or member of the crew” (*Marlborough Express* 1919). Consequently, Cane was thoroughly interviewed by the Sāmoan Epidemic Commission. The records indicate that by the time the Commission started their investigation, a lot of blame was going around and various people in charge were defending their reputations.

Possible Role of the London Missionary Society

During the colonial power transition, the London Missionary Society Church maintained dominance in the Sāmoan islands, but other denominations, namely Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Latter-Day Saints also gained followers. Naturally, the LMS rejoiced under the New Zealand flag, that country being an outpost of the British empire. Logan praised the LMS for the work conducted in Samoa and recognized the Christian influence on the lives of the people. The institution of the church, specifically the LMS, evolved with the changes that occurred in the government and *fa’asamoa*. When New Zealand occupied Samoa in 1914 the LMS had forty-two native pastors in Savai’i, seventy-six native pastors in Upolu, and forty-six native pastors in Tutuila and Manu’a (*One Hundredth and Twentieth Report* 1915). The Church was vibrant and active in all areas, including at the high school level. Perhaps the strongest division of the LMS church at the time of New Zealand occupation arose within the Native Advisory Council (NAC) of the LMS, called the Board of Elders or ‘*Au Toeaina*’ (Goodall 1954). The ‘*Au Toeaina*’ served under European missionary leaders as a Church Congress with legislative powers.

In 1915, the LMS had agreed during a Deputation from the Directors that the Native Church would shoulder the “responsibility of paying for everything” (*Chronicle* 1926). In addition to paying for European staff, the Native Church would need to share the costs for the *John Williams* ship and contribute to foreign missionary work. Apart from salaries and church buildings, the *tāulaga* would pay off debts to the LMS in London, contribute at least ten percent to the Home Mission Funds, donate funds to LMS missions in other lands, and cover the salaries of the European missionaries (Half Yearly Meeting Samoa 1917). This would mean covering the entire costs of both Church and Mission. Part of this transition was due to the financial impact of the First World War on the London Missionary Society in England.

At first, Sāmoan church leaders were hesitant to take on such a financially demanding task. The Sāmoan Church wanted to maintain the “old order” and referred to the LMS as the “Mother” Church, and themselves at its “Child” (*Chronicle* 1926). The secretary of the LMS Board of Elders, Rev. Imo, argues in his letter to the General Assembly, “*Ua matou matua taofi e lei oo i ona po ua tatau ai ona tuua taotasi le Ekalesia i Samoa; aua e lei masani ma le faatauaina tonu o itu eseese e pei ona faatonuina ai e Alii ole Au Faatonu*” (Imo to Fono Tele 1916). A translated version of that exact letter highlights the point made by Imo, “We are strongly of [the] opinion that the time has not yet come when it is advisable to leave to itself the Church in Samoa because they are not accustomed to the correct administrations of many problems in the same way as they are administered by the LMS Missionaries.” In May 1916, where this topic was discussed, the Sāmoan delegates at this annual meeting “were unanimous in their rejection of any and every scheme of self-control” (Minutes Samoa District Comm. 1916). Imo pressed upon the fact that this task was extremely new to the Samoan clergymen and they may not be ready to shoulder the major costs of the Church. This scheme was known as the “five years testing period” (Smart to Colleagues 1928). If the LMS Samoa Church proved themselves capable of this financial burden, they would be able for self-support and “absolute control” of their finances.

Although the Native Church feared this responsibility, they agreed to make the mission self-supporting by raising £5,000 each year for the next five years. Sāmoan clergymen saw this as a test of whether they were capable of achieving the task of becoming self-supporting (*Sulu* 1930). The challenge of being a “warrior for God’s work” or *toa i le galuega ale Atua* plays a major role in Sāmoan heritage, reflective of the commitment to God by the Sāmoan people.

The decision was made to begin to raise funds in 1915. The LMS Sāmoan District Committee meeting of 14-17 December 1915 passed the resolution that a new formed Joint Committee comprised of European LMS missionaries and representatives chosen from each of the seven districts of Samoa would “formulate methods” to raise the proposed sum of £5,000 for self-support (Minutes SDC 1915). This financial offering (*tāulaga*) became an outward expression of Christian commitment to God within the ministry in Samoa and in the mission fields. The word *tāulaga* basically refers to an offering or a sacrifice (Milner 1966). In the Christian Bible *tāulaga* can mean a living sacrifice, for example Abraham’s offering of his son Isaac, or the giving of tithes. As in all religious societies, the offering of gifts to gods and spirits is normal and is manifested differently. Sāmoans too offered gifts to their spiritual ancestors and gods in different forms. The arrival of the missionaries transformed the attitude of giving or the act of tithing. The “old” ways were not necessarily removed, rather, the LMS introduced another method of giving. With these financial offerings were expected personal, family, and village blessings. More importantly, it was an outward confirmation of commitment to family, village, congregation, and especially to God. The LMS’s *tāulaga* was taken on by the Sāmoan clergymen and leaders, despite their initial reservations. As previously stated, the Sāmoans wanted the Europeans to continue their “pule” or total control in all affairs of the Church, including finances.

During the Annual Meeting at Malua in May of 1916, the “new scheme” was approved by the *Fono Tele* (General Assembly). The *Fono Tele* had hoped that members of the Church would bring in half, and “adherents” or followers of LMS would bring in the rest. Every registered member was required to subscribe at least 6 *seleni* (shillings) a year to the central funds of the Church. In addition, each church congregation were required to put in 6 *pene* (pence) each. The *Sulu* magazine of the LMS had the following statement,

e ao ina latou fai taulaga I le ta'i ono seleni i le tausaga e fai ma faavae o galuega a le Ekalesia i lea tausaga ma lea tausaga. A o au lotu ia lafolalo le tai ono pene i lona lua o Aso Sa o masina taitasi o le tausaga (Sulu 1930).

Translated by the author

each church member is required to give 6 shillings each year. Every church congregation are required to offer six pence on the second Sunday of each month of the year

The *Fono Tele* agreed that “monthly collections be taken up, every 2nd Sunday morning of the month (Minutes SDC 1916). This new scheme would begin immediately in January 1917. Also, these funds would supplement the offerings at the Annual collection or *tāulaga* every May. If this collection schedule is correct, there is a likely possibility that the push by the LMS Church to meet the £5000 yearly might have in fact played a role in the quick spread of the influenza.

The *SS Talune* docked in Apia Harbor on Thursday, the 7th of November. Based on the information gathered on the timeline of the periodic monthly *tāulaga*, the second Sunday of November is the 10th. It is very likely that members of the Joint Committee responsible for collecting the *tāulaga* who had contracted the flu spread the disease during this monthly event. As mentioned in the *Samoa Epidemic Commission* report, the Medical Department and the public, including Logan, “had no particular knowledge of the ravages of this scourge” and that it was only when the mail arrived by the *Talune* that “recipients of letters and papers were made aware of the state of affairs in New Zealand and the outside world” (Elliot et al. 1919: 8). The information about the influenza was contained sealed in an “unopened mail” aboard the *Talune* (Field 1991). If Logan did not know of the influenza, most likely the LMS were also unaware that passengers were infected with the disease. The second Sunday of November was only four days after the arrival of the *Talune*. By the time the collection of the *tāulaga* commenced the spread of infection would have begun. The commitment of the LMS to achieve their financial goals of £5000 yearly was the main objective; unfortunately, it was likely that as parties of clergy and church leaders began to travel to parishes throughout the islands to collect the *tāulaga*, the disease spread with them, albeit without their knowledge. It is important to note that at the time approximately nearly seventy percent of the total population belonged to the LMS. Population on Upolu was approximately 22,587 with 15,289 LMS followers, 4,228 Roman Catholic, 2,606 Methodist, and nearly 500 as other religions. In Savai'i, population was approximately 13,818 with 8,497 as LMS followers, 1,607 Roman Catholic, 3,547 Methodist, and 167 as others. Manono and Apolima was approximately 751 with 383 LMS followers, 271 Roman Catholic, 81 Methodist, and 16 as other (*O le Faapoopo* n.d.).

The Native Church met their goals for the first few years. In 1917, the church raised £9784, well above their target. This followed by £8207 in 1918 (SDC Fono 1919). There was great pressure upon the Sāmoan Church to collect these contributions to keep the operations of the LMS running. The *Hundred and Twenty-Third Report* of the LMS (1918) confirms that the Church had “A system of special collections for a United Fund was set on foot.” This emphasis on the need for special collections to support self-government by the Native Church appears to have played a devastating role during one of Samoa's most trying periods. The executives of LMS Church were very concerned about the spread of the influenza, however the Secretary of the Sāmoan District Church, Rev. Hough, seemed unsatisfied when the *tāulaga* dropped in 1920, two years after the flu. Rev. Hough wrote: “This is just what we had expected. During the first four years we had been clearing away all sorts of difficulties. If you think that after you have explained a thing to a Sāmoan and he says he understands perfectly, you are finished with the subject, you will be sadly disappointed” (*Chronicle*

1926). Without clarifying what he meant, it seems that Hough did not take into consideration that despite the loss of nearly 20 percent of the population, Sāmoan clergymen continued their efforts to keep the operations of the LMS going. At the time, following the worse days of the epidemic and its impact on church leadership, Sāmoan society saw a transition by a younger generation to the helm of chiefly power and pastoral leadership. Despite the tribulation that the epidemic forced upon the church, the LMS still wanted to maintain their financial obligations. As the *LMS Report*, reported,

Those finance [sic] is not the most important aspect of our work, it is a significant proof of the Church's vitality that even after the disaster they have still been able to pay to the full their obligations for the support of the Mission (Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Report 1919).

Within five years, the Sāmoan Church had built its confidence as a result of their efforts, and later received full financial control of LMS Samoa Church (Goodall 1954). At the General Assembly meeting (*Fono Tele*) in May 1922, the LMS Sāmoan Church gave the financial responsibility to the Sāmoan Native Church to “pay for everything it uses for the work of God” (Smart to Colleagues 1928). This would include caring for white missionaries, supporting LMS schools and programs, mission ship, and for general costs of the ministry.

Conclusion

New Zealand was accused by a group of surviving *Faipule* (House of Representatives) who wanted an “official inquiry” into the devastation on the people of Western Samoa. Logan arrogantly dismissed the Sāmoan leaders with the result that he “embittered rather than silenced them” (Hiery 1995: 176). As J. W. Davidson recorded, “Logan’s administration was brought to an end by the epidemic” (Davidson 1967: 96). Not long after, Logan departed Samoa for home leave. His superiors, deciding to replace him, “felt that he was becoming mentally unbalanced” and thereafter appointed Colonel Robert Tate in January 1919 (Tomkins 1992).

History has few sources to describe how the Sāmoans felt about the New Zealand’s role, however Sāmoan chiefs accused New Zealand of negligence and recorded their memories in song. In 1966, three senior men from Sale’a’aumua village recorded a song which had been written about the 1918 epidemic. The actual date of when the song was written is uncertain, but it reflects the horrific experience during the epidemic. The survivors of the terrible illness that claimed thousands of lives, Taua Fatu, Paipa So’o, and Matila Lagona expressed their preference for the departed German administrators Solf and Schultz, as opposed to the New Zealand Governor, Logan. The *pese* (song) defined the feelings of hundreds of Sāmoans toward Robert Logan and the dissent from *matai* of the *Faipule*. Moyle (1990) documented and translated the following *pese*:

Fuaiupu 1
Lopati e, le Kovana e
Se ‘e tausia nei Samoa e
Fai mai ‘ua ‘e sola ‘i Niu Sila e
Ina ‘ua tupu ‘o le mala e
‘Ua o’o mai nei ia Samoa e.

Verse 1
 Governor Robert,
 You, who were looking after Samoa,
 They say you fled to New Zealand
 At the outset of the disaster,
 Which arrived here in Samoa.

Fuaiupu 2
Talu lava ‘oe Lopati
Tainane ‘o le ali’i fomai’i
Fai mai na ‘e alu e asi’
E leai se fa’ama’i?

Verse 2
 It was all because of you, Robert
 Who knows whether the doctor did,
 As you said, go and inspect
 And that there was no epidemic?

Fuaiupu 3

'Ua le galo lava l a'u sa'afi

'O le Malo lea 'ua tuana'i

Ma le ali'i Kovana sa tatou masani

Pe lelei 'o le tausiga a a lalou ali'i foma'i

Ma ali'i maotofi ali'i e o Siamani?

Tali

Fa'anoanoa, fa'anoanoa

Lo'u alofa 'i Samoa e

'Ua mauai lemala

'Ua 'uma e le otii ni 'aiga, 'a 'ua i Vaimea

E, fiafa'alogologo 'i le fono a faipule

Oi, 'iupumalie o laulauga, Toelupe e

Fa'apea 'o le Kovana 'o le ali'i e fai mea sese?

'A 'atausiatatou e le Malo o Meleke

Verse 3

In my longings, I have not forgotten

The former government

And the governor with whom we were
familiar

Was not the care shown by their doctors
good,

Not to mention that of the numerous
German officials?

Chorus

I grieve, I grieve,

[Such is] my love for Samoa;

Caught by disaster,

Whole families were wiped out, and are at
Vaimea

I wish I could have heard the meeting of
chiefs

And the fine words of your speech, Toelupe
Saying that the governor was the one who
had done wrong

And that the American [Samoa]

Government should have taken care of us.

The final report issued by the *Samoa Epidemic Commission* concluded that a total of 7,542 persons died because of the influenza epidemic. A thorough investigation with interviews and site visits concluded: "that in seven days after its [*Tulane*] arrival, pneumonic influenza was epidemic in Upolu; that it spread with amazing rapidity throughout Upolu, and later throughout Savaii" (*Samoa Times* 1919). The devastation from influenza pressured New Zealand and challenged their role in the islands. Without doubt, the New Zealand holds responsibility for the influenza, however, this article considers how, on two isolated islands, the disease spread so far and so quickly. In addition to communal practices of *fa'asamoa*, this paper suggests that based on the timeline of the monthly *tāulaga*, McLane and Rowe could be correct in their speculations that it was the unfortunate coincidence of the arrival of the *Talune* and the planning and commencement of the Samoa-wide *tāulaga*.

This article does not place blame on the London Missionary Society or the *fa'a-samoa* as guilty institutions, accepting the verdict of history that the blame falls on New Zealand. As it happened, the LMS had continued to serve God by conducting their fundraising to support greater indigenous authority and responsibility and very likely inadvertently spread the influenza in the process. Neither LMS records nor government records verify the suggestions by McLane or Rowe, but given the timeline of events, there is a high possibility that the push to collect the *tāulaga* may have caused the rapid spread of the disease. Sāmoan nationalism was not confined to the church either, as the epidemic had political consequences. Within a decade Sāmoan leaders began to challenge New Zealand rule through the *Mau* movement under O.F. Nelson and Tupua Tamasese and the chiefs of many of the leading districts of Samoa. This is testament of the Sāmoan saying, *pau se toa ae tula'i se toa* or when one warrior falls, another will rise.

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