

## EPIDEMIC YEARS.

A comparison of the returns for 1923 with other years when the country suffered from epidemics may be of interest :—

Year.	Population.	Births.	Deaths.	Excess of Births over Deaths.	Excess of Deaths over Births.	Epidemic.
1907 .. ..	33,354	1,389	1,564	..	175	Dysentery.
1911 .. ..	33,629	1,453	1,827	..	374	Dysentery and Measles*
1915 .. ..	35,554	1,611	1,451	160	..	Measles.
1918 .. ..	38,093	1,509	8,437†	..	6,928	Influenza.
1923 .. ..	33,685	1,701	1,398	303	..	Dysentery (shiga).

\* Measles first visited Samoa in 1893, and caused a large number of deaths, but, as records were not kept at that time, no definite figures are available. Its second appearance was in 1911.

† As far as can be judged from the records available, both these figures are considerably overestimated, the figure for deaths being approximately 1,300 overestimated.

## POPULATION, PAST AND PRESENT.

The first estimate of the population of Western Samoa available is that of Commodore Wilkes, of the United States Navy, who visited these islands between 1838 and 1842. His estimate was 46,600 for what is now known as Western Samoa—i.e., the islands of Upolu, Savai'i, Manono, and Apolima.

In 1845 a census was taken by the London Missionary Society and the population given as 40,000. The Rev. J. B. Stair, who was resident in Samoa when this census was taken, considers it as an underestimate, but states that the population was certainly not more than 45,000. Captain Erskine, R.N., in 1849 reckoned the population at 32,000.

In the *Samoa Recorder* of January, 1854, a paper published under the auspices of the London Missionary Society, the population is given as 29,237. The figures given for 1854 are probably fairly accurate. The London Missionary Society had by that time become firmly established, and its churches were dotted throughout the group. It was probably in a very good position to get accurate returns through its native pastors.

The above figures, even if taken as only approximate, show a rapid progressive decline during the period 1839 to 1854. The writings of the early missionaries and navigators furnish the reason for this. Thus Erskine, in his "Journal of a Cruise among the Islands of the Western Pacific," after giving his estimate of the population, says, "This number, it is to be feared, is still gradually though slowly diminishing. For some years past the islands are said to have been visited during the wet season (October to April) with a severe species of influenza, which has sometimes passed through the group twice during that time. From November to January, 1847, this epidemic was unusually severe, sixty deaths having been reported in one district of 2,500, and even a larger proportion in some marshy and damp situations. During last year the whooping-cough, said to have been imported in a vessel from Tahiti, made its appearance for the first time, causing, in conjunction with the war, but in a larger proportion, a calculated reduction of 5 per cent. of the population in a period of eighteen months."

The Rev. J. B. Stair, who resided in Samoa from 1838 to 1845, says, in "Old Samoa":—

"The population of Samoa, when compared with that of other groups, is large, but there are good reasons for thinking that it was much larger formerly, before Europeans first settled amongst them. For many years before the introduction of Christianity it had been steadily decreasing, principally in consequence of the ferocious and bloody wars in which the Natives so constantly engaged. In various parts of Upolu I have often noticed traces of a much larger population, and the general testimony of the Natives confirmed this belief. Sites of deserted villages and remains of plantation walls could often be seen in the wild bush; and in many parts of the islands places once largely populated have now very reduced numbers.

"More than a century ago (1784), La Perouse, in writing of a district at the east end of Upolu, says: 'At 4 o'clock in the afternoon we brought to abreast of perhaps the largest village that exists in any island of the South Seas, or rather, opposite a very extensive inclined plane covered with houses from the summit of the mountains to the water's edge.' And again: 'We saw the smoke rise from the interior of the village as from the midst of a great city.' Since that time this district, in common with many others, has been frequently devastated by sanguinary wars, in which the slaughter was great. The population, at the time I knew it, was extensive as compared with other districts, but was confined to the coast. The inland districts and settlements of which La Perouse speaks had disappeared. This is the case generally throughout the islands; but few inland villages remain in any island, with the exception of Upolu, where some fifty-four are found; whilst on Savai'i there are only thirty-eight.

"On the mountains in the neighbourhood of Falelatai, where, in 1840 all was bush, there had been formerly extensive villages; whilst the road over the mountain, leading across from that place to Fasito'otai, a distance of nine or ten miles, was at one time lined with detached habitations, so that the Natives, in describing it to me, have often said that a child might have travelled from one place to the other alone, the parents feeling no anxiety about it, in consequence of the houses being so near to each other along the whole distance. At the time I often traversed it the track was quite deserted, not a house being found throughout the whole distance; but ample evidence still existed of former settlements. Even as late as 1829, a populous village existed between the two places, the site of which, at the time I visited it, was comparatively clear. Many of its inhabitants were killed in the war