

Mombas, April 18, 1855

Reverend & Dear Sir –

The East African Mission has suddenly been brought to a close – not by any action of ours or decision of yours – but by an instrumentality wholly unlooked for until a few months past, & employed by the Almighty & righteous Governor of nations – worse though those instruments may be than those on whom he has vengeance executed by them. (See the heading of Hab. 1) As I have told you in a letter of Jan. last, so it has come to pass: the Masai who came then, are now proved to have been only spies. All had been quiet since then, & a week ago, on the 11th inst., I with Mrs. Rebmann without having a thought of the Masai came here for about 8 or 10 days until I should have written & despatched my letters to Europe, when on the fourth day after our arrival, on the 14th inst., the news came, that during the previous night the Masai had come again in great numbers to the Duruma country, set fire to their cottages, killed the men, took women & children prisoner & carried off large herds of cattle. A servant whom I sent off to Kisuludini, to ascertain the truth of the report, only affirmed the sad tale. Our Rabbai people however are still quiet & will be so as long as any considerable number of their unfortunate brother tribes remain in front of them, saying that the Durumas & Kiriamas must first be killed & destroyed before it can become their turn – though the enemy has come within only half a day's distance of their small territory. The indescribable wretchedness of the Wanika tribes themselves as of the Government of Said Said, whose subjects they are said to be, will be seen from the fact that absolutely nothing is done on either side to defend themselves or to assist them in doing so. If they perish, they perish, & the Missionary may perish along with them.

Teitas, even of Kadiaro are said to have acted as guides to the Masai & set the cottages on fire, while the dreaded warriors stood ready to receive the inmates, aroused from their sleep, with their terrible spears pointed at them. – Thus not only a Missionary Station on the Kadiaro is put out of question, but even in Rabbai security of life and property is gone. Nor is any turn to the better to be expected, as long as the Arab Government lasts on the coast. I need scarcely say that I do not consider it our duty to brave danger in which the great question is only about cattle. I should therefore think myself perfectly justified in leaving E.A. at once, if we had time enough for getting our things down to Mombas by the time the Native vessels will sail for the North. At the same time I am anxious to finish my study of the Kiniassa language before I leave the place. As it is, we will remain till October, when the Native vessels will again sail for the North, though we may be oblig[ed to spend] most of the intervening time here at Mombas.

It is very remarkable how the convictions we had come to within the last year about our Missionary work in E.A. – as we have stated them to you before we knew anything about the movement of the Masai – are now borne out by the judgment that is being visited on our Wanika. All the East African Nations are in fact incapable of receiving any benefit from Missionaries, until a new element of Christian power will have stepped in in their behalf. I have told you in former letters some instances to shew, how little, during about 10 years of Missionary labour among them, our real character has been appreciated – I can now add some more, which are most striking: When the Masai first made their appearance, in Dec. last, the Durumas thought, Dr. Krapf was at the back of it,

out of revenge for not having been permitted to pass through their country on his way to Kadiaro – supposing him to have come to the Pangani river, from whence he had secretly instigated them. – Again, on our now coming to Mombas just before this present attack, the people took it for granted that – through our books – we were aware of it & fled in consequence. Thus are we known among the people, who by this time, ought certainly to have known us better.

Between the 10th & 13th of Febr. Last, H.M.S. Penguin, Commander Etheridge, was here, as Major Hamerton tells me, to gratify a wish of Commodore Trotter, who takes much interest in Missions, to see how the "Mission got on". Mr. Erhardt, suffering as he then was of a fearful tremor in his right arm. I had hoped the medical man on board might come up with me to our Station – but this was against the rules of the ship. My interview with the Captain took place on the 12th, & I could only tell him that here on the coast we had nothing to fear from the Imam's government. It is however a most delusive hope to think that East African Missionaries benefitted either by a Christian Commodore at the Cape or a Bishop of the Mauritius, though they may be the warmest friends of Missions – because as yet no communication whatever exists between here & those places. Nor is it likely that "a regular communication along the coast can be established" before East Africa is thrown open to European enterprise.

Mr. Erhardt took leave from us on the 19th of March for Zanzibar, in order to go to Europe in a Hamburg vessel around the Cape. So we are now quite alone here – but our God is with us.

I have lately read the death of Dr. Barth, the African traveller. I do not wonder that no blessing seems to attend those travellers – but I very much wondered at a Christian Government, as that of England, lending a helping hand to travellers, who for the sake of penetrating into new countries, join themselves to Muhamedan thieves & robbers in their "razzias" (as those wicked & cruel expeditions are called) against defenseless heathen tribes. –

If the English government wish for the exploration of Africa, let them put down the hateful policy of the Imam of Mascat, & compel him to throw open the East African Coast to the Europeans as such – not merely to a few English Missionaries, when travelling on the regular caravan-reach, which lies opposite to Zanzibar & by which the very heart of the Continent can be reached, will be as safe, as can be expected in Africa.

It is now very clear to me why neither Dr. Krapf nor myself succeeded in penetrating farther than we did. The truth is that where the Natives themselves have no regular & frequented road, there neither the European traveller can force any. The Wanika generally go no farther than Ukambane, while the trading country to the Mombasians is only Jagga. As soon as the East African road will be thrown open to European enterprise & commerce, you may send me on an exploratory tour to the great inland-sea of Uniamesi & Njassa, & you will find me willing to go. – Mr. Erhardt brings home a carefully constructed map, by which the centre of Africa, instead of being a high table-land, as was hitherto supposed, will be shown to be an immense basin or depression of the continent, occupied by a body of water, perhaps as large as the Caspian Sea. The map is a combination of native authorities most various & absolutely independent of each other, as brought to bear on what is actually known of this continent. The steps

by which we were gradually led to this most interesting conclusion, will be communicated to you by Mr. Erhardt.

We are most anxious for an answer from the Committee to our letters of Sept., Nov. & Jan. last.

Commending ourselves to your Christian sympathy & prayers, I remain,
dear Sir,
Yours respectfully
J. Rebmann

P.S. April 30.

On the 25th inst., Mrs. R. remaining here, I went up to Kisuludini to fetch a few articles. I had Abbe Gunja relating to me (what I had also heard before) that the Masai displayed the most consummate coldness & sense of superiority over those they had robbed. They remained for 2 days on the spot feasting & dancing & challenging the Wanika in language the most spiteful & taunting. If you are men, they said, come & defend your cattle. We have only taken what is ours, as to you belongs only wari (grain-food). The message they left behind for the Wanika still unrobbed was this: " Take good care of your cattle, not depriving the young ones of too much milk, so that we may find them in good condition at the time we shall come to fetch them. " A party of the Wanika from Kiriama together with some Wakamba are said to have made some faint attempts to fight them, but without even the effect of disturbing the great body in their mirth – a few skirmishers only thinking it worth their while to rise up & spear them. The same absolute fearlessness they shewed again by the slow & easy marches in which they returned – I listened the other day to an animated relation about the Masai, made by a Suaheli-man to some 15 or 20 persons who had just arrived from Zanzibar. An Arab, to whom he more particularly addressed himself,, & who now & then put a question to the speaker, asked at the conclusion whether the Wanika would come to sell themselves, when he burst into laughter & went off saying : " Get your Guinea- corn ready" and the whole company dispersed. This is the great anxiety the Muhamedans on the coast feel toward their fellow subjects, the heathen Wanika on the mountains – always watching for opportunities for buying them for a few measures of grain -. When other parts of the heathen world were allowed by God to be subjected to a Christian power more especially to save their souls by making way for the Gospel – our poor Wanika seem to want that power even for preserving their bodies.

We intend to go back to Kisuludini the day after tomorrow. If the Masai should come nearer with their attacks to Rabbai, we must of course repair to Mombas; for though our house might be a sufficient protection to us, what shall we do there, should the Rabbais fall the same easy prey to the enemy as their neighbours of Duruma did, & in all probability no servant would remain with us.

It may be that Abessinia is opened again to Missionary labour, while here the door for the present is shut up. Without prescribing to the Committee I must say that it is my heart's desire to labour for Africa, but I also acknowledge my distrust in Missions, the footing of which is nothing better than the doubtful & worthless favour of a Native prince, be it forced from fear of England or purchased by presents.

We intend now to go to Aden with the vessel of Oct. next, from there to Cairo for the benefit of a change of air, and to await the farther instructions of the Committee.

I inclose the account of the half year ending 31st March, 1855.

Mr Young also will hand you over a bill placed to my credit of the amount of £13.

J.R.