

Zanzibar, March 23, 1857

Reverend & Dear Sir,

In my last of Dec. 15 I informed you, that in accordance to a letter from the British Consul, written on the death of the Imam, we should have to leave our Station for this place, where I should wait for your farther instructions, while Mr. Daimler would proceed to Europe with the first opportunity. Since then the Lord has been pleased in the ordering of remarkable events to remove every lingering doubt as to the question whether he really bids us to withdraw for the present from a part of the world, where certainly no Macedonian voice had ever called us. First it was the visit at our Station of such a man as Commodore Trotter, on the 12th & 13th of January – only a month before the time we had fixed upon for leaving. His coming appeared the more a special direction from the Lord, as he had lived under the impression that the East African Missionaries had all left - & because never during the 12 years of existence of this Mission had there been such a critical time as that when he came, & never before could his visit have been of such inestimable value both to the Missionaries & to the Society at home. Nor did I ever get acquainted with a man before, who was so anxious, so indefatigable & so faithful in making his inquiries & gathering information. He stooped to the lowest – in measuring even our little rooms – was unwearied in making his astronomical observations both at Kisuludini & at Rabbai Mpia – in taking the bearings of the inland mountains Kadiaro & Kilibasi – of which on going back he had a splendid view - ; & rose to the highest in taking the kindest interest in the people, in our convert Abbe Gunja, & investigating the true nature of our position in the country. He would have taken us at once in his ship to Zanzibar or even to the Cape if we had been ready -& almost entreated us to go to England at once. May the Lord reward him for the true christian kindness we experienced from him. He was accompanied by Mr. Layard, who made the most of the little excursion for enriching the museum at the Cape with specimens of natural history, & to whom Mrs. Rebmann most gladly handed over some insects we had collected.

Scarcely had they been gone - & we seemed to be alone again as ever, when, on the 14th of the same month, Capt's Burton & Speke stood before our door. They brought me your letters of Sept. last. That quiet place, where for years past nothing would happen from January to December, seemed at once been destined to come in for a share of the events of the world. On the following day the Captains went back to Mombas, but wished to come again during the next week. Reports about the approach of the Masai had for some time been heard again & the Wakamba had drawn nearer to the Rabbai territory with their large herds of cattle, but were driven back on Sunday morning after the Captains had left. The rumours about the Masai became now more frequent every day, on Sunday & Monday, however (Jan. 18 & 19) they were contradicted by saying that the approaching body of men were not Masai but a Suaheli-caravan returning from Ukambani. But on Monday noon the Wakamba actually fled towards us, because they had seen smoke at some distance, which was supposed to be from cottages set on fire by the enemy. In the evening the report became more distinct, to say, that three divisions of them were advancing – burning, killing & robbing. The Rabbais began to drive their cattle more towards the "Kaja" (Rabbai Mpia) & the coast, while the Wakamba brought theirs nearer to us. An anxious night was before us & we placed ourselves more especially under the protection of

Almighty God – (Mr. Daimler also had left for Zanzibar) – The morning came & great was the excitement prevailing all around, but it was evident that the enemy had made no farther progress during the night, though they were now only about a 6 or 7 miles distance from us – No wonder that the report was now spread at Mombas that the Masai were actually surrounding our Station to prevent our escape. The kind captains ran up to us sword in hand. This was on Tuesday the 20th of Jan. But it seemed as if the savages were kept back by a higher hand until the helpless should be in safety. I myself had not a single firearm in the house, & the captains who would have defended us could only stay with us till the next morning. I had already given orders for a boat to come on Thursday, to take our last things & ourselves to Mombas on Friday – but the same report which hastened up the Captains had also induced the Governor of Mombas to send us a boat during the night from Tuesday to Wednesday, so that if it had not been for the tedious carrying down of loads on men's heads to a distance of between 4 + 5 miles, we might have left the place of danger on the same day with our friendly visitors. But as it was we had to wait at least one day longer. On Thursday, the 22nd of Jan., we were at last delivered out of all apprehension that we might lose our lives – not for the sake of the Gospel, but in a cattle war. There was not a soul present, expressing only regret about our going away - & the wife of Abbe Gunja appeared only anxious to secure the few fowls & a few water jars we left behind. As to Abbe Gunja himself, he had agreed to go with us to Zanzibar, & would soon see us again in Mombas, where we knew we should still be detained for some time. As we could not detain the Governor's boat so long until all our things should have been carried down to the coast, we left a number of them behind - & another week passed until our servants & other people who carried loads had entirely finished their work. This was on the 29th of Jan., when – lo! – on the 31st, the terrible hordes of the Masai actually came down to the water's edge – even to the plantation of Abdullah ben Bisillah – to Makirange & Maungùya – to Kibedaùso & even to Makùba (the ferrying place from the Continent to the island of Mombas). The Mombasians made some desultory attempts to fight the savages, but with the loss of some of their principal men (among them the brother of the Governor himself) succeeded only in rescuing a few hundreds of cattle.

As to our Rabbai people – nothing was known about them but the general statement that the slaughter had been great & that all their cattle had been taken. For a whole week all communication was cut off between them & Mombas. I did not even know whether dear Abbe Gunja was among the living or the dead. At last I prevailed upon one of our servants accompanied by another man to go up for the farther tidings of the calamity which had befallen them. Before they returned however – another man, who had been in our service formerly, & had just returned from Rabbai, removed my fears about Abbe Gunja, informing me that he with his wife & children had escaped & that he with his surviving countrymen was now living in the "Kaya", which now they had at last remembered to fortify again. My servant was to go over from the "Kaya" to Kisuludini, but being told, that the place was unapproachable from the smell of corruption caused by the dead bodies being so numerous that their countrymen could not think of burying them – he refused to visit the place. After a day or two, Abbe Gunja himself came down, & from his mouth a correct statement of the attack of the murderers & robbers was at last obtained. The two small buildings attached to our house & covered with coconut leaves, the cottages of our servants & of Abbe Gunja, the huts of the "Kaya" had not – as a previous report would have it – been burnt; in fact it was only a very few huts the enemy

had taken the trouble of burning, but the tale of misery & destruction was still great. Alas – the heedless beings had been warned. So near had the enemy encamped during the previous night, that several men who were watching their plantations against thieves, saw their fires & went near enough to ascertain that they were not kindled by Wakamba, but by the Masai. After telling it to Abbe Gunja who slept near them on his plantation, they went each to his family to make them escape into the forest. This was about 3 o'clock in the morning. Others were warned of their danger, but despised it saying, that the Wakamba before them would have to be killed first when they would still have time to flee. Others deceived themselves by the absence of cattle in their neighbourhood, saying, that the robbers would only follow after cattle. But before daybreak their security was dissolved into despair; the enemy broke in upon them like a flood; the cries of the dying & the pursued awakened them; the most merciless enemy was upon them, sparing neither old nor young, neither women nor children, but just mowing them down as they found them on their way. The hamlets of which only a few persons escaped, were just those nearest to our Station on the way to Mombas. Whole families were cut off. Among them was Abbe Mabaya Saha with his brothers – (he was the man who always took so active a part in their heathen festivities, that we designated him among ourselves as the “master of the ceremonies”) – the large family of a man called Zumbe, who himself had died during our stay in Egypt last year – a man named Nganga with one of his wives (he himself had been an (sic) Mganga, or native doctor) – Abbe Momkale, an old man, who with some others had slept in the “Kaya” & on being roused by the distant cries, went out to ascertain the cause; he had no sooner passed the gates, than he was met by a small party of the Masai, who speared him. The same party rushed into the “Kaya” itself & killed seven flying women – Shaha Dume, the chief of the other division of the Rabbai tribe – all these were persons well known to Dr. Krapf & Mr. Erhardt. By far the greater part of those fallen were however women & children of the Wakamba as well as of the Wanika. Abbe Gunja watched the approach of the enemy at the dawn of day, & as they passed at some distance from his plantation, he managed to hide himself from their view behind a banana tree; when they returned late in the afternoon with their unnumbered herds of cattle, they passed right over his fields, but again he was concealed from them on the top of a coconut tree, which he had just climbed for taking down the palm wine.

A few days ago, when speaking on the subject here at Zanzibar, he used the expression “that God had swept his country clean”. Arrogance & pride, in which no one would any more listen to his neighbour, had been the result of almost every one making himself the owner of a herd of cattle, despising those who had none or only a few. Agriculture, which formerly was – with the keeping of sheep & goats only – their principal business, had begun to be despised. – Lasciviousness had risen to a frightful & shameless degree – Wakamba & Wandigo women openly offering themselves to Rabbai men for a draught of palm wine. Abbe Gunja while helping me in writing a dictionary of his language, constantly relates to me instances of the far more simple & far less corrupted life of his countrymen even within his own memory. (His age is about fifty) – Here you have a fact similar to that of the South Sea Islanders, who also had become most wicked & most degenerate, just at the time when the Missionaries came, so that the lie of their enemies became most plausible, when they said that the Missionaries were the cause of it.

Thus God himself has broken his ever deluded Wanika & checked them in their onward rush to the brink of moral & physical destruction - & I fully believe, that

His judgment will be seen in future as an essential part of a system of divine preparation, by which they will be gradually led first to appreciate & then to desire what now the Missionaries have found them to esteem as something in value far below their cattle & their toddy. One great cause of their ignorant pride has thus been torn from them, & they feel it the more as they had relied on their cattle as the means of providing themselves with grain in the famine before them at least for the next half year – occasioned by scarcity of rain & neglect of agriculture. It is more than probable that they will be driven, as in former times, to the selling of their children & each other – a circumstance – which – if we had remained, would have placed us not only in a painful but a very dangerous situation, because by rendering assistance & in consequence preventing the sale of human beings, we should have excited the jealousy of their muhamedan neighbours on the coast, who are always on the watch for buying men for a few measures of grain. The Wanika of Duruma had – from their ivory trade with the Wakamba – become the richest but also the proudest. Their money was especially laid out for increasing their women, & the great numbers annually brought to Mombas from the Niasa countries, made it easy for them to indulge their passion in the highest degree. They even preferred slave-wives to their own country women, finding they had more power over the former. But now – as many as have escaped from the spears & clubs of the Masai will be taken from them by the famine, which with them is still greater than with the Rabbais. Thus God judgeth among the heathen, & His judgments are true & righteous.

On the 14th of Febr. we at last set sail from Mombas, & arrived at Zanzibar on the 16th. The question about my accompanying the expedition had been decided before my arrival here, as according to the Consul's statement – such was still the enmity of the Arab Government against the Missionaries, that if the Captains had appeared in any connection with us, all assistance would be refused. A private wish I had none, but was simply determined to let circumstances decide the question.

As to any favourable results of the expedition with regard to Missionary enterprise – the present unsettled state of things on the coast forbids us to indulge any hope of the kind. Thus I should have been entirely free to go home at once, but the desire of studying more the Kinika-language & of procuring as fair a copy of it as I have of the Kiniasa, still keeps me here till about autumn, unless the Committee for some reason or other wish me to stay longer & make their wish known to me within the time specified or unless some remarkable event indicated the will of the Lord for my remaining. Of this however I am confident, that the East African Mission is not actually given up but only suspended until the Lord God opens the doors no more by Muhamedan but by Christian hands.

Commending ourselves to your Christian sympathy & prayers

I remain – my dear Sir –
yours respectfully
J. Rebmann