

(279-283)

Mombas, Sept.9, 1859

Reverend & Dear Sir,

It is now fourteen months since I received the last letter from the Committee (dated Feb. 26/58) & I am almost inclined to doubt whether my last letters of Sept. 16 + of Dec. 15/58 with a P.S. of Feb. 11/59, have actually reached you. In my letter of Sept. last I made a request that the East African Mission should be recommended by the Committee to the kind attention of the new British Consul, as it had been done to his predecessor, he, & not the muhammedan ruler, being the real authority, under which the existence of an East African Mission is at all possible; & not knowing, whether the request has been attended to, I now repeat it.

We could not leave Zanzibar so early as we had anticipated. The hostile intentions of the Sultan of Muscat with regard to that island, the execution of which would have caused a confusion all along the coast & especially at Mombas, rendered it necessary that we should quietly remain there until it was known how matters would terminate. Mombas was under strict orders to prevent every Arab Bagata from entering the harbour. An American merchant ship, coming from Muscat, brought at last the good tidings of the English having been just in time to cause the fleet of Said Thuen to turn back. All the foreign residents of the island believed themselves to have been delivered from a great danger, especially on account of some hundreds of Sepoys, Said Thuen was said to have taken into his employ, & who might have perpetrated cruelties similar to those in India. The danger was increased by there being a powerful tribe of Arabs at Zanzibar, who, in connection with another disaffected brother of H.H., had long been conspiring against him, & as it now appears, had actually received money from Said Thuen, in order to cause a revolution to dethrone Said Majid. The Arabs, & especially the sons of the late Imam, being thus divided against each other, are fast breaking down any power of their own, & the present ruler of Zanzibar is only in so far safe in his dominion as he leans on the European powers represented on the island. And here it is, my dear Sir, that we are to recognize the arm of the Lord in making way for His Kingdom in East Africa, the real history of which will now commence.

It was on the 16th of April we took our leave & again stepped into a dirty Arab Bagala, to which you are only reconciled by the thought that it is only for a short time. On the 19th we safely arrived at Mombas, & were but just in time before the rainy season commenced. The first news that met our ears was of a painful & horrible nature, & unheard of among Muhammedans. When visited by the Cholera, which during the dry season had spread all along the coast – finding all their usual sacrifices ineffectual- they at last, in their despair, had recourse to sacrificing human beings, drowning them in the sea or burying them alive! Some said that all the principal men of Mombas had made themselves thus guilty, but the Cathi, who afterwards helped me in revising my translation of the Gospel of St. Luke into Kisuaheli, acknowledged it only of one, who soon after the dark deed had been done, died himself. Resignation to God (Islam) is the very name by which their religion is called, but even where it seems to exist, it is apathy, & true resignation is only learnt in the garden of Gethsemane.

Randnotiz auf Blatt 1: „Will you kindly forward Mrs. Rebmann’s letter to her sister; as it contains a few general notices of the Wanika, I sent it for your perusal.”

The house we formerly occupied had, during our absence, been turned into a garrison of Arab soldiers, & was now left in such a wretched condition, that it looked more like a den of thieves than anything else, & we were obliged to take up our abode in a neighbour's house. All study was now at an end, & once more I had to put my hand to all kinds of manual employment. After about a month however, I got our former house so far repaired, that we could once more take possession of it, when, alas, the sad tidings of the downfall of our house at Kisuludini reached us. Remembering how good that house still looked when I visited the place in Nov. last, I could hardly believe the message, though on the other hand the rains had been long & heavy enough to render it credible. Still I indulged the hope, that at least parts of the walls might still remain, over which a thatched roof could soon be made to serve at least for a temporary residence, & on paying a visit to the place on the 7th of June, we had the pleasure of finding still more left than we had ventured to expect. The greater part of the front & the whole side Mr. Erhardt, & after him Mr. Daimler had occupied, were tumbled to the ground, but our own side was still standing, though the roof also was partly broken & threatening to come down. No safe dwelling place remained, but a whole wing still standing, which only wanted a framework for a thatched roof, was such a relieving circumstance, that we gave thanks to the Lord in the midst of ruins (Mrs. Rebmann had accompanied me in this short visit). The work to be done being of such a nature as did not require my presence on the spot, but could be left to Natives of Mombas, we had only to make up our minds for a prolonged stay at a place in which we never wished & had even thought we never could stay for any length of time. But thanks be to God! With the exception of a slight attack of fever after the rainy season was over, our health has been very good. In this connection however I must not forget to mention that in repairing the house I made it look more comfortable than it had ever done before, a circumstance, the importance of which Dr. Krapf would never appreciate, though it is evident that in Africa, as well as in the wilds of North America, the stability of a Mission will always in a great measure depend upon it. To this prolonged stay at Mombas I was the more easily reconciled, as I was anxious to revise my translation of the Gospel of St. Luke into Kisuaheli with Cathi, from whom, with the Arabic New Testament in his hand & being perfectly conversant with the Kisuaheli language, I expected to derive considerable help in the clearing up of all difficult passages. In this however I was greatly disappointed; a translation made by him from the Arabic would be a complete jargon. The Arabic translation of the Bible is not understood in E. Africa, & I have reason to suspect that this is not merely to be attributed to the difference in the Arabic as spoken in different places, but also to the translation being at fault. Only a few days ago I had the passage of Luke 12, 49, which being translated literally says just the contrary of what it wants to say. The same is the case in Dr. Krapf's translation of the Gospel of St. Luke into Kinika, as also the two debtors in Luke 7, 41 are represented as demanding money instead of owing it. I see more & more how much care & time is needed to make a correct & intelligible translation into a language, the only source of information about which is the mouth of the Natives. In Febr. I had thought it would be ready to be sent to Bombay in April, & now it is September & still I have not done revising it.

The remaining part of our house in Kisuludini being now ready, we are on the point of removing there. Having asked for a fresh Missionary in my letter of December last, at a time when the whole house was still in existence, I think it proper to say, it would be the better if he were a single man, for a married man would have a lot of inconveniences to put up with until another house is built.

Dr. Roscher did not go to the Kilimanjaro, but turned to the South, & all I know about him is contained in the following extract from a letter from Captain Rigby, dated Zanzibar, Aug. 23: "Dr. Roscher, when last heard from, was at Kiloa, very ill with the fever. He says, when any Arabs see him, they become frightened & refuse to take him inland, thinking he will die."

Of course we do not know what may be for us on the way, but so far back as Aug. 1858, we have received no Missionary papers whatever.

Commending ourselves to your Christian sympathy & prayers,

I remain, dear Sir,

Yours respectfully,

J. Rebmann