

ANNUAL LETTER

Reverend & dear Sir -

My letter must be a very simple one, bearing the impress of a people whose low estate, to a thoughtful mind (see Sir Samuel Baker's introduction to his book on Africa) tempts the question whether they are not as far below Christianity as they are below civilization; or whether, cut off as they are from even the means of civilization, they are not equally cut off from Christianity, & whether, after all, we do not merely force upon them, artificially, both civilization & Christianity, so that, if the European Missionary was gone, all would come to an end; - a people, it must be added, who, supposing somehow or other they were Christians already, from the nature of their country & their seclusion from the Christian & civilized world, could not but remain just as degraded in their outward condition as they are now as heathens, & in this respect the case of the inland tribes of Africa is widely different from that of the South Sea Islanders & the Indians of North America - having no direct intercourse with Christian Europe, but instead a wall of separation interposed between them in a Muhammedan power on the coast. - I have often thought it significant that neither preaching nor converts are mentioned in connection with Paul's intercourse with the Bagbagoi of Meleti (*Side note J.R.:* "The only case recorded to us in the Holy Scriptures of an Apostle having been brought in contact with man in an uncivilized state"), while, on the other hand, he always most readily availed himself of a synagogue; facts which shew that Christianity is facilitated by civilization & bears the same relation to it as the kernel does to its shell, so however that while there is no kernel without a shell, there may be a shell without a kernel. It is the condition of things in East Africa - poverty & destitution shut up - the want of a shell for the kernel of the gospel that is being introduced - that imposes so large an amount of secular employment on the Missionary (as intimated in my letter of May last), & will do so, in my own case, as far as I can see, for some time to come; a kind of work which, while it is a cross to myself, makes a detailed account, concise as it may be, undesirable in Missionary reports; I will therefore confine myself to a simple statement of the principal features that marked our life at the Station during the current year. The contrast between the early & latter part of the year shows, in a striking manner, the peculiarities of human life in East Africa.

In the month of April & the early part of May the East African Mission presented a most pleasing aspect; first in the hearty welcome our Wanika Christians gave Mr. & Mrs. Sparshott by singing several hymns (which I had composed in their own language, & which W. Jones had printed for us, of his own accord, at Zanzibar), & wishing them the blessing of God on their labours among them; & then in the freshness of the love & zeal with which their new teachers had taken up their work in the school, which for so small a settlement as Kisuludini still is, was well attended, some heathen girls & older persons having been induced to come by the impulse they had received from the fresh arrival (especially the "bebi", only the second European lady they had ever seen). In the evening a still greater number would attend the meeting for prayer. All looked most encouraging & my fellow labourers were delighted with the work they had found to do. The pleasing scene was already about to change when Mrs. Sparshott wrote to me (I being at the time at Mombas), to say: "My dear husband just held out long enough so that the school was not given up for one day during George's absence". And "One of the

evenings, George was at Mombas, 19 came to prayer. Among them were several women, Polly interpreted." I was much gratified in seeing the cottage, in which they lived, & which I had built for the Africans from Bombay, doing so much service, both as a dwelling house, & a school & chapel. On Good Friday the elders of Ràbai Mpia came to greet & welcome the new teacher & his wife, of course in the expectation of a present which, however, Mr. Sparshott declined giving. Leaving the regular Church Service to my younger colleague with George as an interpreter, I took the elders to the shade of the trees which have grown up on the Station, & preached to them "Christ crucified", as specially commemorated on that day. There being no word in their language for a cross, I had to form one, as I often did before. One of them (a nephew of the late chief), who, from the commencement of the Mission, had heard the Gospel many times from Dr. Krapf, in reply held out the prospect of the gradual conversion of their whole tribe to Christianity, illustrating it by the gradual filling, in the rainy season, of the detached hollows in a riverbed, elsewhere dry (so peculiar to this & other tropical countries), until those overflowed & presently formed a torrent. In describing the process he imitated, as only Africans (& perhaps wild men in general), can imitate, with his voice, the natural sounds made first by the dribbling & then by the mighty rush of the water. His speech is important as indicating that portion of the success of a Mission which statistics can never shew. And though we must not confound national with individual conversion, yet in a heathen land not under a European government, where Paul can no more say: "I am a Roman", the good will of those in authority will, humanly speaking, be the only security for the existence of a Mission. Grains of the Gospel seed are also sometimes met with where no one would expect them. So a little heathen boy who one Sunday accompanied me to a neighbouring hamlet, passing some shepherd boys on our way I sat down with them by the wayside to rest, & shewed them some small pictures illustrative of Bible history; one of them represented the Saviour on the cross, & my little companion, on seeing it, at once remarked to the other boys: " This is the one who was nailed to a tree; this is he who bore our sins – who was made a sacrifice for all men – who procured for them "ngufu mbizo" (good strength or ability)". Surprised as I was I made him repeat several times what he had said. Who, I thought on seeing him afterwards, would suspect you, with your scanty & dirty piece of cloth round your loins/the mark of a heathen in this country), of knowing any thing of the Gospel? – On Easterday we had the Lord's Supper, & the progress of the Mission, slow as it is, & under existing circumstances must be, was marked by the two converts who were first baptized (Abraham & his son Isaac), having been so consistent in their walk & conversation as Christians, that they could be unhesitatingly admitted as Communicants.

But to come back to the school we saw worked with the freshness of European energy. Alas – Africa's clime soon made a spoil of the one, & African alarms, shortly after, put an end to the other. The European Missionary, here as in W. Africa, is first made helpless himself before he is permitted to help others. In the course of May, Mr. & Mrs. Sparshott had not only to give up their work in the school, but they themselves had to be nursed & the school removed to another locality. The remaining Africans from Bombay now proved indeed a help in time of a need which, in the case of the wife, was increased by childbirth. It is difficult to say what they would have done without them; so truly had the Lord provided for our friends in their time of sickness. They were also much obliged to Mr. New of Ribe for his kind attention & services rendered to them for a considerable time. In the end of Sept., just after losing their babe, they went to Mombas for a change, where they still are. Mr. Sparshott requested me to say, on his part, that, in consequence of repeated attacks of fever, they have made very little progress in the language, & have been prevented from making any attempts at the real work (those, of course, excepted which they made before they were taken ill). The school, now reduced to its former small attendance, was still continued by George in a half finished building, to which, exposed

as it was, to the cold South Monsoon, blowing with great violence during the Summer months, the poor, half naked children would come but unwillingly. But it was not the cold which, for the time, put an end to it. The warmer weather had already returned (in Sept.), when other circumstances occurred which left neither woman nor child on the Station. The children belonged to three families. One, the father & two boys of which are baptized, removed for a time to another place; the second, with a stepfather (the late father of the children had been baptized), living in a lonely hut on their plantation, on the boundary of our settlement, fell a sacrifice to the enmity that has now existed for 3 years between the Ràbai & Kiriama tribes; the man & his slave wife being treacherously killed at night & the children carried off (one little boy excepted who had concealed himself). There now remained old Abraham Abe Gonja with whom stayed some grandchildren. His relatives being alarmed for his safety urged him to take refuge in one of their "Kayas" (temporary towns), until the country should again become quiet. He left with his wife & children on the very day (Sept. 24) Mr-. & Mrs. Sparshott had gone to Mombas, where I myself was at the time. And so the little school was at an end. October passed away quietly, but during the last fortnight the poor people have again been kept in constant alarm, & some more stragglers were killed & women carried off by small companies who kept roving about on the Northern borders of the Ràbai territory (at a distance of 4 or 5 miles from us). The present disturbance is not confined to our quarters but extends over a large portion of Eastern Africa. A few days ago an Inkamba came to me with the request that I might build a wall for him round his cattle pen against the Masai, offering to pay me in cattle. I replied that I would give him 50 heads of cattle if he but finished for one what I had begun. He laughed & said "bàsé", meaning he must leave it. The Gallas, formerly a terror to all their neighbours, are now themselves despoiled by the Masai & even by Wakamba, & broken up & scattered by the fanatic Somali wanting to make them Moslems! Such is the unsettled condition of these countries at present that there is far less prospect of an extension of our Mission inland than there was 20 years ago; but there is the better & higher prospect of their extremity becoming God's opportunity.

Commending myself to your Christian sympathy & prayer

I remain

Reverend & dear Sir

Yours respectfully

J. Rebmann