

Basel Mission Archives

"Baum to Basel"

Title: "Baum to Basel"

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Date: Proper date: 09.08.1856

Description: The first part of the letter is dominated by the problem of economic relations with the local population. Baum writes that they are open beggars, and not above stealing what they cannot make for themselves. Apparently they have sayings (proverbs) "We take the white man's things", "When the black man finds out that he will remain poor here, he feels that he would rather have been born in Europe". He writes that if you do not give them something when they have visited you, they feel as if they have lost something. This problem extends to their relationship with the king. On Baum's arrival the King visited him often, and made some presents of food. However, he clearly expected a return for this, and after these were going to be limited to a fine Chinese fan and a razor, the king began to put pressure on the missionaries. Eventually he walked off with a suit of clothes belonging to Süß which valued Süß at 15 Thalers. The missionaries then set themselves to obtain payment, eventually offering to take a pound or land, but when they were shown a plot which they might have, it turned out to be one made over to Süß long ago, so the missionaries went back to asking for money. After persistent attempts to get payment Süß appears to have taken away a boy as a pawn and secured him to a log. This precipitated a violent incident when next day the king came with some elders and 2 idlers in tattered jackets. Baum calls them "Schiedsgerichte". They were followed by a crowd of people who broke down fences and made off with clothes and handkerchiefs, loss valued at 24 Thaler. They also stole a double barrelled gun belonging to Süß. Although the king threatened serious punishment there seemed to Baum little hope of them being returned. Exactly what the judgment of this court was was Baum not to say, except that Süß did not accept it, and threatened to appeal to the colonial government, which Baum says is worth nothing in this district. Eventually however people in Gyadam were prohibited from selling anything to the missionaries. Much of the account of the steps towards the progressively worsening situation is written in the third person singular, and Baum makes a point of mentioning that during the informal court in the mission compound the king was friendly enough to him. (Continue on 22 August). The king has visited them in a friendly spirit, and Süß' gun has been returned. The Prohibition on selling to the missionaries has not been fully effective, and the people who are selling to them are not exploiting their weak position. 2 young men of Gyadam and one slave brought from another place are trying to attach themselves to the missionaries, though Baum is sure this is because of the material advantages which would follow, and not on account of their preaching. On August 11th the King of Cape Coast arrived as an emissary of the British government, with the question whether the Gyadam people were going to pay the Headtax or not. (Letter continued on 29th August). The Cape-Coast emissary became involved in the settlement of the quarrel between mission

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and the chief of Gyadam. One of the Gyadam people was quite openly wearing part of the stolen cloth- In the end, however, the Cape Coast chief decided that the missionaries, should accept the land which Baum says about 1/3 of the land Süß had already bought. There is a rumour that the Gyadam chief gave the Cape Coast chief a large present of gold and sheep. The missionaries propose to take the case before the English commandant.

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