

Basel Mission Archives

"Schmid's Report to Basel on Poverty, Illness and Accident in the Social Life of Kwahu"

Title: "Schmid's Report to Basel on Poverty, Illness and Accident in the Social Life of Kwahu"

Ref. number: D-01.47.V..120

Date: Proper date: 10.10.1887

Description: Akwapim he remembers as a place of no evident poverty and one where one never saw crippled or blind people. In this respect it could be favourably compared with Europe, but in Kwahu both poverty and illness is often seen. He describes the general level of life along the lines that the primitive tribes ("Naturvölker") have a simple pattern of needs because they know no other. Inter al he remarks that the best crossing places for rivers are often marked only by a creeper which has been stretched across between two trees. Their food is sometimes of scanty quality, but they are hardly ever in a real state of hunger. Describing the illnesses they have seen, he says that smallpox, measles, whooping cough are epidemic. In addition most people suffer from a skin infection at some time in their lives, and at the foot of the Kwahu hill there is a lot of leprosy. People are only isolated during the last stages of this disease, and then only in the sense that they are given a separate room in the compound. Fever is common, and dysentery because of the cold, and the lack of clothing and bedding rheumatism in all its varieties causes much suffering. There are frequent accidents too, coming from sleeping around the fire, and the insecure stands for the cooking pots at the fire (Tschopp had been in the first-aid part of the Swiss army and Schmid describes his treatments as often having good effects). Reciting all this perhaps does not give one a sense of a people in great need and indeed the difference with Europe is that whereas in Europe poverty, illness and accident is treated in a tradition which has been taught the virtues of Christian love, in Kwahu there is some natural love, it is true, but also much lack of feeling, cruelty, and lust for gain in the way these things are handled. Extending his exploration of this difference he argues that polygamy, slavery, pawning, nephew inheritance, and the dark power of superstition are the elements which hide even the remnants of natural love among the people. On the other hand in a Christian country Christian faith enables the sufferer to bear his sufferings calmly and hopefully, partly (not exclusively in this presentation) because of his knowledge of the 'Homeland above'. The heathen does not know any of this, instead of removing hindrances and letting the natural processes of healing take effect, the heathen either lapse into complete apathy or on the other hand interfere with them forcefully. The plant-world of the tropics offers a large number of medicinal materials which are indeed known 'by rote' to many local people. But they use them impatiently, large quantities of substances with dramatic effects are given. He has seen a woman in a faint being treated with a mixture of lemon juice and pepper in the eyes and nose, and her name shouted in her ear. They are not impressed with European medicines, at least not until they have seen them successfully used. (These they offer at the station at cost price). He repeats the point made during the Afwireng illness that local doctors only charge when the

Basel Mission Archives

patient is cured (he described these as mostly fetish priests and soothsayers) and offers the proverb 'Oyare nsae a, wonnye ayaresade'.

- Subject:** [Archives catalogue]: Guides / Finding aids: Archives: D - Ghana: D-01 - Incoming correspondence from Ghana up to the outbreak of the First World War: D-01.47 - Ghana 1887: D-01.47.V. - Abetifi
- Type:** Text
- Ordering:** Please contact us by email info@bmarchives.org
- Contact details:** Basel Mission Archives/ mission 21, Missionstrasse 21, 4003 Basel, tel. (+41 61 260 2232), fax: (+41 61 260 2268), info@bmarchives.org
- Rights:** All the images (photographic and non- photographic) made available in this collection are the property of the Basel Mission / mission 21. The Basel Mission claims copyright on the images in their possession and requires those - both individuals and organisations - publishing any of the images, to pay a users fee.