

# Basel Mission Archives

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"Obrecht's Report in his Section of the Abetifi Mission District in 1898"

**Title:** "Obrecht's Report in his Section of the Abetifi Mission District in 1898"

**Ref. number:** D-01.69.VI..132

**Date:** Proper date: 25.01.1899

**Description:** Over the whole station area the increase in the Christian community in the year was 220. Nevertheless movement into the church is still a matter of individual decisions though among the great mass of the people many acknowledge the truth they are preaching and recognise God as the giver of the fruits of the earth they will not move out of their traditional ways. The people have had occasion to recognise the signs of God's anger in the course of the year - locusts in November and towards the end of the year small-pox (which in part accounts for the high number of deaths among the Christians). 'Is it not a wise proceeding of God's that his kingdom here grows so slowly, and so much like the early stages of the growth of the mustard seed? Here in this area there must be much more Christian understanding, and much more Christian practice in the life of the people before the masses can turnover a new leaf and be accepted into the Christian community. Should, for example, the new chief of Abetifi and his people want to become Christians - we certainly long for this, and have often spoken to the chief about it - it would not be possible for us and our helpers to go through seeing that all the people were thoroughly prepared for baptism, nor would we be able to see that all their family situations were arranged in accordance with Christian patterns. How many heathen ways, and how much worldliness would be brought into such a Christian community - perhaps these forces would even gain the upper hand.' In Abetifi the presbyters (John Ata the senior) are given a good report. The community bought the house of a Christian living away from Abetifi as evangelist for £8, and also have themselves put up a new school house as big as the earlier one to house the increasing numbers. Offerings (including the Mission Anniversary offering) almost doubled. Christians begging for re-acceptance are being asked to pay the church tax for the period of their absence. Almost half the adult male members are away from Abetifi - most of them working in Kumasi (Ramseyer adds the marginal comment that several are working on the Kumasi mission station, but others are earning a living elsewhere, and some of these are not living as they should.). A women's society has been set up, meeting every week after evening prayers on Sunday - the women taught songs and hymns and shows a biblical picture which is then explained to them. The suggestion that they should be fined for absence was turned down, but the most regular attenders were invited to a tea party. Sunday School held - 20 youths and girls were compulsory attenders, it having been decided that no young person could stay on the station who did not attend either the regular or the Sunday school (Obrecht mentions heathen children staying with Christian families on the station as falling under this, rule.). It was also attended, mainly for the sake of literacy instruction by young fellows from the heathen village. 7 people died in the course of the year, 2 of smallpox, both children. In the heathen town almost one person died daily. On the station many

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caught it, including Perregaux - the lymph which they asked for from the Colonial Regime arrived rather late, but they distributed it with some success. In Abetifi itself one of the measures adopted to limit the spread of the illness was the prohibition of firing of guns at the death of people. Also hens were sent out of the town. Over the whole of Kwahu people tried to infect themselves with the sore of those already suffering from the illness in the hope that they would thereby be protected at least to the extent of having a lesser attack. The missionaries warned the Christians against this but they did not trust enough in their Protector and many who had this treatment were dangerously ill. 8 members were excluded, 2 voluntarily when they went to live in Abetifi town, 2 more for adultery, and 3 for unbiddableness. Others were excluded from the Communion, including two men who had distributed liquor to their neighbours at an obsequy gathering - they inter al were asked to bring up a load from Accra without payment, asked to do double this if only they could be allowed to take Communion, but were refused on the grounds that presence at communion cannot be 'earned' by work or bought by money. 16 people moved away - this includes 4 boys who were transferred to the Middle School in Begoro, 3 fante pupils at the evangelist's school who did not return after the mid-year vacation, and a mother and a daughter who have fled to their home in Fante, in the case of the daughter deserting a husband sick with a chronic illness. All attempts to locate them from Nsaba have failed. The increase of 56 was made up of 10 adult baptisms, 16 baptisms of children of Christian parents, 4 re-acceptances, and 24 pupils moving to Abetifi to take join the Boarding School or the Evangelists' School. Bukuwura - a place with a small congregation visited fortnightly - lost a married pair excluded through too much quarrelling. Mpraeso - the work held back by strife between the catechist (W. Preko) and his wife - she at one stage going to live with her heathen relatives in Abetifi. Examples given of the results of the catechist's pre-occupation - the catechumens at Mpraeso not properly prepared for baptism, and a young married couple in Atibie going to a fetish priest in order to be advised how to end their barrenness. Obo - 5 Christians had to be excluded - 5 children of Christian parents were baptised, 2 Christians moved to live in the town, and one excluded Christian was re-accepted. No baptisms of adult catechumens - they like most of the Christian men spent most of the year away from the station in order to gather and sell rubber. As a result some of the houses on the station are falling into ruin, and the chapel started two years ago is not half finished. One of the exclusions was of a key young man who had learned to read, and during the absence of Catechist Th. Hall in Akwapim to get married had been given the job of holding the morning and evening services. However during this period his uncle died, and he was persuaded to become head of the family. Mose Ofusu has since fallen into polygamy and is practicing as a fetish priest, though his wife has since asked for re-acceptance. Another (unnamed), the earliest Christian in Obo had to be excluded for his unbiddableness. He had long hoped to be chosen presbyter, and indeed had exercised an irregular authority in the congregation. Obrecht notes that all the Obo people were absent for long periods either on their farms at the foot of the mountains, or plying the rubber trade. Akwasiho - little progress - Obrecht says of Akwasiho

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that the people are Kwahus and Asantes who live without political order. There is no chief there. Asante-Akim - general progress, and a great welcome for travelling preachers. Bompata - Boateng ordained in the course of the year, 38 adult heathens baptised, and 27 heathen children, almost all resident on the station land. Among the newly baptised are many who were brought from the interior as slaves - 'you notice how happy they are now in their freedom, and how busily they build their houses on the station. They are living as it were in their own village, under the protection of their Lord and Saviour, they are safe and need to fear no more.' The Christian village is almost as large as the heathen town, and the chief of the latter is - understandably - steadily more bitter against Boateng. He has taken to living away from Bompata, and now the heathens too come to Boateng for guidance. There has been a young man from Koforidua in Bompata in the year posing as a Wesleyan, and offering instruction in English. The Basel Mission school has caused anxiety, with only one rather slow teacher, and 4 classes and 43 pupils. Agogo - difficulties with the chief. This reported already in the course of the year and continued in secret. 12 people baptised, not as many as there might have been. Agogo people too have been way gathering rubber, another candidate had not started to build a house on the station, and yet another, Pepra, had his baptism postponed apparently because he would not promise to send all his children to school (he had a heathen wife, and the daughter's schooling was especially a matter for argument). Patriensa - 9 baptisms of people whose home Patriensa is not - otherwise few visible results, not even many people at street preaching. If no progress in another year the station will be given up. Dwaso - 19 baptisms (including 10 adults) but no school in spite of Boamma's efforts. Odumase - the first baptism celebrated in the year, and 7 young men as catechumens beginning to build houses on the station.

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- Ordering:** Please contact us by email [info@bmarchives.org](mailto: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](mailto:info@bmarchives.org)
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