

# Basel Mission Archives

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"Dieterle to Basel"

**Title:** "Dieterle to Basel"

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**Description:** In reply to the Basel question what practical results the proclamation of slave-emancipation has had on the slaves themselves, Dieterle writes that in Tutu, Asantema (Obosomase), Afwerase, Aburi and many farming villages, on the whole only individual slaves have left their masters. Some of these, however, having got themselves certificates of freedom from the Court in Accra, return to their master's village and farm the land given them by their masters as free men. This is perfectly proper if the freed slaves undertake to help, the ex-master's family pay any debt which is incurred by members of that family. In the Kyerepong villages (of which Late and Adukrom are the largest) if a slave marries into the family and behaves well, he can become the heir and family head - thus in Larte already once a slave has been chief. The Tutu and Asantema people are also Kyerepongs, and from the first 13 slaves have left out of a village population of 1000, from the second 19 have left out of a village population of 700. Most of the latter have returned to Asantema, however, to work on the land earlier given them by their master - whether they regard themselves as under some obligation to their master's family. Dieterle does not know how many slaves of Aburi masters have left - in Aburi itself few slaves were resident, they were scattered, in farming villages, through a tract of land from 2 to 5 hours broad and 10 hours long. Again, you hear of individual cases in which slaves have claimed their freedom. Recently a slave from Kunkanuru, a place an hour from Aburi, took his master to court in Accra because the latter owed him for 10 pots of palm oil. The master had to pay, and since the slave was an important man, who himself had a family and slaves, he remained 'in accordance with custom' on the land which had previously been given him by his master. The latter will be possible only in a few cases, however, while in most cases if a slave claims his freedom he will have to leave the master's town. Eyigbes and Ewes from the Peki district have seized their freedom rather more than Donkos or Hausas - i.e. slaves from the interior. The former fled to the Aburi area during the 1869 Asante invasion then fell into debt and were either sold or pawned. If the emancipation had not been declared their masters would have sought them back - to this extent they are safer than before. In reply to Basel's question whether the Emancipation has had any influence on the level of wages, Dieterle writes that any influence it may have is much less than exerted to prices in general by the following factors: Many more ships are coming to the coast than before, which is pushing up the prices of local foodstuffs, export goods and imported goods. The Asante war The concentration on palm-oil cultivation rather than food-raising and the breeding of animals. It is also notable that the amount of fish moving inland is much less than in previous years; this may well be because the fishermen are engaging more in the landing business than in fishing now that there are more ships on the coast. In reply to further Basel questions the emancipation

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has caused neither the formation of a poor proletariat nor packs of thieves. There has been a pack of robbers in the Accra area for a long time - though perhaps individual emancipated slaves have joined themselves to it. As long as the slaves do not claim emancipation in large numbers they will be well able to earn their livelihoods by working for individuals or the government, that they will not find themselves any ordered style of life like that. People are hoping that in the rural areas the masters will have enough land to hand some over to the slaves, but one fears in that sort of situation that the slaves will either remain dependent on the masters, or alternatively will have to turn to trade if they do not want this. The latter would cause the government problems, and it would be good both for the government and the emancipated slaves if a colony could be set up for them. In this connection Dieterle wants to draw attention to the deserted tract of land between Akwapim and Fante along the Densu, 3 hours from Aburi, and North and North-West of Nyanyaw. There is plenty of room there for such a colony, and it will be near the route of the road the government must build to Akim from Accra, if it ever intends to attempt seriously to exploit the wealth of the interior. Such a colony could not be simply handed over to the ex-slaves, it would need European direction. In reply to Basel's question whether the slaves understand the meaning of true freedom, Dieterle writes that they have not. Indeed they know the proverb - 'If you have no master, you are lost'. Most still wonder whether to make use of the Emancipation Proclamation or not, and fear that unless they want to endure new humiliation they would have to return to their masters. The latter hope that, like many other laws promulgated in the protectorate, this one will not be enforced.

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