

Basel Mission Archives

"Asante, Mohr and Werner to the Slave Emancipation Commission of the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast"

Title: "Asante, Mohr and Werner to the Slave Emancipation Commission of the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast"

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Description: In Kibi about 100 slaves have left their masters. Most have fled to the missionaries order to have explained to them what the new law means and often cannot quite believe that from now on they are free. People are also coming from other Akim villages to fetch home their ex-slave relatives. The sister and aunt of the Okyenhene have lost almost all their slaves. The Okyenhene has tried to bring back slaves by force and in most cases would have succeeded had not the mission protected them or in some cases taken them into mission employment. The slaves of the royal family have on the whole had to endure the worst treatment. Many of them say that had the Okyenhene publicly proclaimed the Emancipation and guaranteed them human treatment in the future they would have remained in his service. In other Akim villages (Asiakwa, Asuom, Begoro are cited as example) the chief has had the Proclamation read out and given the erstwhile slaves the rights of citizens. They are remaining in their towns on familiar terms with their erstwhile masters. They hear that in Fante mang slaves have taken advantage of the Proclamatieen to free themselves As for wages - in Akim the Emancipation has had no effect as yet. But since the missionaries are the only wage-employers they should in the future be no longer dependent on the whims of individual potential workers in view of the large free labour force, it should be possible to keep wages down to their old levels. In Kibi most slaves were from Akim villages, and have returned to their homes - slaves from further afield are setting out to farm, which no-one hinders in view of their plentiful land available, or are going to Akwapim where there is no shortage of employment. There is thus no danger of developing a poor proletariat, nor so far, has there been any report of robbery or violence - except in that the Okyenhene has himself been responsible for it. For the future they suggest a number of points to make the Emancipation effective: There should be colonial officials posted to every interior tribe - this would make an end to the 'godless misconduct of the constables'. They should have the power to check the judicial activities of the chiefs in order to protect the ex-slaves and their families from roundabout persecution. They could also provide protection for the ex-slaves in a straightforward way - the mission station in Kibi already has its resources badly strained with the freed slaves staying in it. The free slaves should be assigned their own land and freed from tribute etc. - this will be better than leaving them with their earlier masters in that they will learn regular work more easily and also will be more accessible to the missionaries More schools are needed - they have had to turn away 20 ex-slave children away from the Kibi Boarding School for want of places. The regime could use the freed labour force now existing to make new roads to open up the inland areas - with roads or navigable

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rivers cotton could be brought to the coast from Kwahu, and Akim timber exported. If at the same time it was made illegal to do more than give gifts to mark a marriage as is the case in Akwapim, the well-known lack of women in Akim would also be cured, since this would break the monopoly of the rich men and the women. There should also be some legal regulation over pawning - at the moment, with interest at 50-100% a pawn is virtually a permanent slave. As for the attitudes of ex-slaves and ex-masters - the slaves are of course glad about their freedom, but it is not an enthusiastic gladness as it was in the West Indian islands. The reason for this is a certain distrust of the government - the people of Akim see very little of the activities of the government, and the few who were not able to turn to the missionaries for help were often rather lost in the face of the new situation. The masters of course are not pleased, but have taken the change quietly, though here and there revenge is sought. There is not the slightest trace of revolutionary opinion in Akim. 'Through the gospel, the school and regular pursuit of their callings by the people, the Colony will be really helped.'

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