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An open letter to the Bishop of Zanzibar (Mr. Frank Weston)

Head of the University Mission in the Eastern Districts of German East Africa.

Hamburg, January 10, 1919.

Right Reverend gentleman;

As a sort of appendage to Mr. Evans Lewin's libellous treatise „German Colonisers in Africa“, which bears the charming title of „Colonisation with the Whip“, you publish an open letter with the equally charming and equally truthful title of „The Martyrdom of the Natives“.

Your letter is dated November 7, 1917, from the Magila Mission in the District of Tanga, of which I was Bezirksamtman in 1905. You address this letter to General Smuts and write:

„You can testify that during the time I served as a porter in your East African Force, your coast column took no harm from my holding command of its African carriers, the work done to time and that without the loss of a single load of food or ammunition.“

You say you have been Bishop of a considerable portion of German East Africa for some ten years. You characterize the German Officials as „efficient, polite, correct in their behaviour and in their official attitude.“ You remark; „I will grant, gladly grant the efficiency of the German system and acknowledge no little assistance from some of the officials, from the time they found us here on their arrival.“ In short you have willingly submitted to the German régime, and you have had no cause for complaint. Despite this you and your Mission pupils „have zealously served the English army in this colony.“ You are therefore, my Lord Bishop, not only a traitor to every Christian precept and principle, through this active military participation in the abomination of butchering white men in the black Man's country, but you are a **peculiarly despicable kind** of traitor to the people amongst whom you had lived and whose protection and hospitality you had enjoyed.

It is not unlikely that General Smuts will be able to appreciate at their trueness these fervent protestations on your part and while finding your services useful, think of what a greater warrior than himself once remarked: „I love betrayal, but I despise the betrayer.“

We „Huns“ have a poet upon whom we have conferred the palm of greatness — Friedrich Schiller. He found the beautiful words of „the curse of an illdeed begetting everlasting evil.“ **Your** illdeed, Sir, has given rise to your evil conscience, and your illdeed consisted in this: your betrayal of the words of the saviour: Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.

„What will the vengeance be“, so you are wailing, „on those who **helped the British kill or capture nearly the whole German population on the East-African battle-fields.**“

It is well that you seem to realize the heinousness of the atrocity of which you have been guilty in leading astray the simple souls confided to your charge, even though your professed horror of the consequences be in part induced by political considerations. These political considerations are nothing more nor less than your endeavour to support the dastardly

attempt to filch the German colonies with the weight of your churchman's propaganda devoted to besmirching the character of the German in the Colonies.

For the wrongs you have been guilty of in seducing the coloured subjects of Germany to betray their Government, may God forgive you. As for ourselves, we shall remain content to heap coals of fire upon your head in forcing you to acknowledge that the „Hun“ you have aspersed is able to be a better Christian than a British Missionary Bishop. **We shall take no vengeance upon your victims.** It was therefore not even necessary for you to seek to avoid the curse of your evil deed nor the consequences of your shameful betrayal by demeaning yourself still further through base falsehoods and foul calumny.

„Many thousands of German subjects in the Colony“, you write, „have been taken by Great Britain to act as porters at the front. **They have assisted our forces to kill or capture their late masters.**“

Yes, my Lord Bishop, there can be no doubt that you are fully conscious of the gravity of your crime — incitement to treason. And the fear that gnaws at your heart is easy to understand. But it is only the low knave and the poltroon who would lie through fear — one would have imagined that a scholar, an educator, a shepherd of souls, a Bishop of the Christian Faith would be above it.

And now, My Lord Bishop, I shall concern myself with your lies and your slanders. Straight to your face and before all mankind, I tell you, Mr. Frank Weston, Bishop of Zanzibar, and Head of the University Mission in the eastern part of East Africa, that you are a shameless liar, slanderer and defamer of honorable men.

Let us first compare our weapons. You write in your capacity as a Missionary Bishop, I answer in my capacity as a Colonial Officer. You write:

„What follows is my own personal experience. I record what I have seen and heard and know.“ It is regrettable but quite in keeping with the **morale**, that excuses the lie as long as it serve the purpose of patriotic propaganda or imperialistic greed, that you never give the time nor place when and where the alleged atrocities are supposed to have taken place nor the name of those who are supposed to have committed them. This delicacy of feeling, **the purpose of which is obvious**, is, as I have said, most regrettable. For it renders impossible to furnish proof or denial in special cases. Such proof, however, is not necessary, since you choose to represent each individual case as the **general practise**. This you do deliberately with malice aforethought and with full knowledge of the extent of your misrepresentations.

You declare: “It may be well to add that I am in my twentieth year of residence in East Africa and in my tenth year as Bishop of a considerable part of German East Africa.”

For 15 years I have been an official in German East Africa and have had control over four of the most opposed sections of the Colony — quite apart from my activities as a judge and as a “Missions- and Personal-Referent“ under the government, I am thoroughly familiar with German colonial methods, with the missions and with our various officials. And now, My Lord Bishop, I would nail you to the wall with **facts**.

You write: “I am personally not averse from corporal punishment: it has much in its favor.“ That is an obvious fact. The British colonies are also unable to do without corporal punishment. In order that the mire of your slanders might stick, you are therefore forced to adopt another track, And so you summon up the colossal audacity to maintain that “flogging is the Germans pleasure.“ With equal justice might I maintain that “calumny is the favourite pastime of English Bishops.“ But I refrain from this, since I am **not** an English Bishop, but merely a member of that race which you and your infamous press have designated as “barbarians.“

After these edifying preliminaries you proceed merrily to work. “The German sjambok, of rhinoceros or hippopotamus hide, is cut to damage, not merely to hurt.“ In every official bureau in German East Africa the rules and regulations of the German Government respecting the punishment of natives are open for public inspection even by English missionary Bishops.

Paragraph 6 of these regulations stipulates that “for the carrying out of whippings the smooth round “Kiboko“ is to be used as hitherto and not the sharp-cornered or twisted variety. Only the smooth form of “Kiboko“ is to be recognized as the authorized instrument

of punishment." The contrary of what you claim is therefore true — care is taken to avoid wounds.

"The German himself presides at the ceremony," you proceed, "to see that no mercy is given." Paragraph 7 of the regulations reads: "The infliction of whipping or caning must always take place in the presence of an official and, wherever he be accessible, of a doctor." Paragraph 9 reads; "The attendant physician or, in his absence, the official has the right to forbid or interrupt the carrying out of the punishment, in case the culprit's state of health necessitate this."

The German official, as you see, is present, not to prevent leniency, but to render it possible. Here, my Lord Bishop, we have two slanders of yours in two lines.

You continue: "If the condemned man continues to wriggle and scream, he is liable to receive the same number of strokes again there and then. Again when the punishment is over if in his pain and excitement he forgets to come to attention and salute the German, he is liable there and then to receive the whole punishment again. Thus while the law orders fifty lashes to be given in two instalments, a man gets fifty at one time; twenty-five for his offence and twenty-five for his breach of etiquette! Cruelty is a mild term in which to describe it — —".

Paragraph 6 of the "Reichskanzlerv Verfügung" declares: "Whenever the punishment of whipping be inflicted, the number of 25 lashes must not be exceeded. A second instalment of lashes can take place only after the elapse of two weeks." The charge that you bring, Sir, amounts therefore to a legal impossibility. You surely do not intend to accuse the "efficient, polite and correct" officials of failing to carry out their instructions? Should you, however, have ventured upon this, you would be telling an untruth, which from my long years of experience in supervision of the native justice I expressly affirm herewith.

But these things are trifles compared to what you or your shady informants, in flights of imagination, venture to declare in the following.

A "friend" of yours — apparently one of your coloured Christians — "was sent by his German official into the woods with policemen and sjamboks, and beaten day by day quite a week until his body was a mass of wounds and sores." If that be true, then, Sir, I must ask you, did you do your duty as a human being, a Christian and a Churchman? Did you report this case to the "efficient, polite and correct" superiors of the alleged-scoundrel? — officials who you gladly acknowledge gave you no little assistance?" And if **not why** not?

Explain that please, you "Man of God" — if you do not wish to stand self condemned as a slanderer and blackguard in the eyes of all true men.

The second friend of yours „was put in the iron hat." A band of iron was passed round his head and tightened by means of a vice-like screw, so as to press more especially on his temples. The agony is unspeakable." If that be true — and during my fifteen years of activity in Africa, never did I once hear of such an instrument of torture — I am once again compelled to ask: did you, Sir, do your duty as a human being, a Cristian and a Churchman?

Did you report this case to the "efficient, polite and correct" superiors of the — alleged — scoundrel? — officials who, you gladly acknowledge gave you no little assistance?" And if **not, why** not? Once more explain yourself, if you do not wish to stand self-condemned as a slanderer and a befouler of the reputation of honourable men.

You continue: "Another dodge is to tie a string to the middle finger, pass it back under and round the forearm and tighten till the man confesses," If this be true — and never during the entire course of my 15 years' activity in Africa, did I hear of this or any similar torture — I must ask you — did you for the third time betray your master? Did you for the third time forget your duty as a human being, Cristian and a Churchman? Did you once more fail to report this inhumanity to those conscientious German officials in whom you, by your own testimony, had such confidence? And once more, if **not, why** not?

You also, it appears, refused to perform this obvious duty, even after seeing how „the gaolers used on the prisoners freely sjambok, heavy nailed boots or the butt-ends of their rifles." And all these things have now been revealed by you, only under the influence of fear

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— fear of the consequences of your low treachery — fear of the Day of Atonement that must inevitably follow. Faugh! who would have thought that the soul of an ordained Bishop could resemble in hue the skin of the simple-minded natives who he betrayed.

But your infamy is by no means at an end. You write: "as a final example of German terrorism, let me add that Germans on tour required as a rule to be supplied with a young girl at each sleeping place."

I am overcome with anger, shame and disgust that a white man, a servant of Christ, a Bishop — save the mark! — should dare to dish up lies so base and execrable, that he should presume to inflict such monstrous fictions upon his countrymen, stricken as these may be by the **rabies** of war psychosis.

The two districts in which your Mission pursues its work were under **my** administration, Lindi in 1898 and 1899 and Tanga in 1905 and 1906, and in the name of my colleagues as well as myself I fling a flaming protest against this slander direct in your teeth. If you will inquire in Magila, in Muheza, Massasi and Nevala, you will learn that I am no enemy of your mission. Order your scandal-mongers to make inquiry in all the districts which have been under my supervision, Nyassa, Kilimandjaro, as well as Rovuma and Usambara, whether aught be known among the natives of my tolerating even the slightest cruelty or immorality — much less of my ordering such! And if the natives do not make answer: "No, never — we still call him Father today" — then **you** shall be said to be in the right.

Let me emphasize the fact that under no circumstances do I profess to have been better than my colleagues. I know that many were better men than I — as, indeed, there may have been others that were worse — we are but human. I may say that I represent the average German colonial official, a man who acts according to the dictates of duty, conscience and inner conviction — a German "Bezirksamtman." But you, Sir, profess, as you expressly declare, **to act as an English Bishop**. You venture to appeal to God in that you declare:

"I see God summon the Entente powers to redouble their patience, and to stiffen their necks for the final battle. I hear, how **He** counsels us all to proceed along this path until the wordly powers give in, and human liberty be crowned **through Christ** our Redeemer."

Such words, Mr. Frank Weston, are blasphemy on **your** lips. God does not speak to a man like **you**. You are merely snivelling and unctuously dispensing the intolerable cant which blights so great a part of the soul of your people. You affirm that you "merely report those things which you have seen and heard in the course of your twenty years experience." You cannot therefore plead ignorance nor illusion, **You lie consciously. You lie and you know you lie.** To term you a gentlemen would be incongruity, to call you a man of honour would be travesty. What you really are, Mr. Frank Weston, Bishop of Zanzibar, and Head of the University Mission in the Eastern Districts of German East Africa, I shall leave the world to judge.

I am, Right Reverend Sir, Yours, etc.

Hans Zache

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