

Letter to James Macle hose, 20 June 1843

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

Kuruman 20th June 1843

My very Dear Friend

I am sorry I cannot begin by thanking you for your last. Your first I have not yet recieved, But I have & abundant cause for thankfulness, and I would now proceed to express it were I not conscious words are inadequate for the purpose. You have got me a good friend in M^{rs} M^cRobert. I pray the Great Head of the church may through grace bestow on you the recompence I wish you in the resurrection of the just. But I am in distress respecting her you must if you please help me out of it. She kindly spoke of sending some things to the Bechuanas, I thought it might be dresses she meant & I could not help telling her I had an aversion to such things. You know how difficult it is to say anything calculated to pain a lady. I felt it sorely. But a conviction that the tendency of these presents of clothes is to hinder the cause compelled me to speak out. You must if you please be so kind as apologise for my rudeness.

Some of the presents consist of good strong apparel & although the distribution of them induces endless heartburnings I should not object to them because they are very useful to the poor of the flock But the freight & land carriage cost as much to the Directors as would suffice to purchase the same in the colony. I remember M^r Arundel once said to me with a sigh, "I dont know what people put into these boxes but if they gave us the money they think them worth that with the saving of expense would soon make up the hundred thousand." I could tell him now and only think how he would stare when I assured him there are in some old dirty ball dresses, old socks dirty as when thrown aside by the wearer. Old dirty shirt collars for people who have no shirts. Old coverings of parasols & silk buttons I remember

[0002]

to have seen on old maid's dresses when a little boy. What on earth makes people send such trash, would they themselves like to go with thin ball dresses if they had nothing under & their skins black? You see acknowledgements from the directors to a whole string of people sometimes, I fancy if the Directors knew all they would return much more grateful acknowledgements if the donors would come, pay the expenses & take them away.

But they are in a dilemma & like ourselves don't like to speak out when harm may be done by it. No one would like to refuse a present from a poor old disciple who longing for the advancement of the redeemer's kingdom, should bring a thing of no value, grateful he or she had been permitted to give to that dearest of causes. Who could refuse the old disciple the delight he or she must feel in contributing. Other considerations besides this would prevent us making a public exposure of the abuses which ~~have~~ are connected with these presents But could we separate the ball dress contribution from the rest for them I should have no bowels of compassion, married they are not, old maids they I think they must be who sent these accompaniments of nonsense, M^r Moffat used to say "any thing will be useful to us" But he had no idea people would have such India rubber consciences

I don't suppose M^r M^c R would have sent any useless articles But I have such a dislike to those which have come I felt constrained to decline receiving any more. I think from the way she writes she has good sense enough not to be offended with me for it. Almost anything would be of [more] value to the cause than the things some send.

I shall now give you some account of the state of the country & the manner in which I have been employed since I last wrote you. I told you of Sebeque and his overseers who were sent to me last year with the present of an ox. On that occasion I advised him

[0003]

not to have the country of the Bakalihari to which he had been driven by Mosilikatze as there was a probability if he did so Mahurath~~e~~ chief of the Batlapi would attack him He acted contrary to my advice & having no guns many of his people were massacred by Mahura - a party of the believers of Kuruman were with him at the very time of attack & as M. is their chief both Sebeque & all the heathen in the interior believed they had acted the part of accomplices to Mahura Some incidents which occurred during the period of their visit served very much to deepen the unfavourable impression. The accidental firing of a musket on the evening preceding the attack by one of the visiting party was afterwards interpreted as having been the signal by which Mahura was apprised of the situation of Sebeque. - The singing at family worship was construed as the incantations for success - and the collecting of Sebeque's people in the morning of attack (it being Sabbath) for public worship as only a pretext by which ~~they~~ to aid the work of slaughter the reception of these news made me most anxious again to visit the interior, that by my presence & explanation I might endeavour to disabuse their heathen minds of the prejudices they had imbibed. I felt if no effort were made for that purpose, the prejudices against our

people might be transferred to our gospel & thus much harm be done to the cause But the natives here were so certain that Sebeque would revenge himself on the first party from Kuruman that fell into his hands they thought it madness to think of going I was therefore obliged to wait some months untill their fears subsided before I could get a few to drive my waggon

On the 21st Feb last I left this & shaped my course for Sebeque's village & after about 10 days travelling

[0004]

reached in safety (Poor Bint lost his wife by the overturning of his waggon in Caffreland. that accident I met twice and yet not a hair of my head harmed. How thankful I ought to be for ~~my~~ [the] merciful preservation. Once I was reading, my legs accross the waggon & I did not know of my danger untill I was suddenly ~~returned~~ [transferred] from the sitting to the standing posture my boxes books bed meal bags & watercask simultaneously crashing their level behind me -) My driver had been one of the party which visited Sebeque at the time of attack and a most precarious recognition of him followed when we arrived at the place where he & the remainder of his warriors were seated. I squatted down beside him & observed my poor servant was looking "unutterable things" Sebeque then demanded of me why I had attacked and destroyed his people & stolen all his cattle. I replied by demanding why he had neglected to follow my advice & thus destroy himself &c. Some of the messengers I had seen last year being still alive then recognised me and we soon became very good friends. He told me the reasons he left the country of the Bakalihari were his people were yearly diminished by a fever which prevails there His heart longed again to eat corn and being ignorant of the power of guns he had dispised the powers of the Batlapi. I partook of his hospitality for several days & was pleased with all I saw of him. He is the bravest of the all the Bechuana This after he had cut off detachment after detachment of the people of Mosilikatze the tyrant was obliged to Amen. "There is only one man in this country said M. & that is Sebeque" - it being Saturday when I arrived I explained to him how we spend the day following. Next morning before daybreak I was pleased to hear his herald

[0005]

the kings orders that "nothing was to be done on that day but praying to God hearing the words of the foreigner" During the different services he was a most attentive listener and he put many sensible questions concerning the strange things I had brought to his ears. He mentioned that he had seen Mr Moffat once but as M^r M. was then young & did not understand the language it is not remarkable Sebeque remembered

nothing of what had been said. May the Lord enlighten his dark mind & lead him to the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.

Leaving Sebeque I proceeded to the Bakhatla a people with whom the Directors have approved of our proposal to form a new mission. I told you something of them before but as I hope to be building a house there long before you receive this I shall give you a little more information concerning our intended station they are very near to the spot where M^r Campbell in his progress of discovery northwards thought proper to turn about & go home. The iron foundaries he heard of but was not permitted to see, belong to them. Very likely he thought the same reasons were in operation there as are in our chemical works at home, nothing of the sort however enters into their heads, they are only afraid lest their iron should be bewitched by the presence of strangers. Iron bewitched is when it is burned to a cinder by the ~~the~~ brisk application of their bellows - and lest this disaster should happen they actually put in medicines with the ore & sleep at a distance from their own houses during the whole season of smelting The connection between the bellows & burnt iron they never dream of. It is all the effect of witchcraft

[0006]

the ore is found in abundance at the junction of the igneous & aqueous formations & nowhere is covered by any depth of soil, One side of the valley being the line of demarcation between the trappean & sandstone rocks the latter stretching northwards gives a different kind of pasturage. These peculiarities will ~~give~~ be of advantage to our station, the iron works will present a temporal consideration and attach the people to the spot untill by the grace of God we have imparted a sense of its spiritual advantages. the different vegetation which exists will probably be favourable for the cattle of the natives. The want of which advantage has always been a great drawback to the prosperity of Kuruman

This town is also near to what was formerly the site of that of Mosilikatze. I walked over it and the place where he suffered his last defeat by a handful of Boers & a very few human bones were the only vestige I could discover of all that belonged to him. He is now living more than 350 miles north East of his former location & still carries on his old practices

When I was at the Bakwain villages I saw several women who had ~~escaped~~ been taken captive by his people last year & escaped again from their tyranny their tale of sorrow had no effect on their callous fellow countrymen but it had a powerful effect

on the people of my waggon. A step nearer to Mosilikatze they would not go, entreaty while & threatening were all in vain, the fellows turned their noses in the sand as if the Arabian Simoom

[0007]

had been passing, & their very hearts seemed like to die with them I was thus brought to the necessity of either relinquishing my design of going still farther north, or quitting the waggon & proceed on a pack ox, I chose the latter & leaving the waggon in charge of my own people with three wild Bakwains of Bubi proceeded on my journey. This mode of travelling has some inconveniences but to me it was by far the pleasantest part of my tour. I visited no fewer than four villages of the Bakalihari where on account of the sand of the desert a waggon could not have come, they are a poor degraded people, the slaves of the other tribes of Bechuanas. They live far from water and every thing we consider essential to comfort But though in one sense destitute in another they are kindly supplied by a bountiful providence. They have shewn me more than 40 different kinds of roots & about 30 different fruits the desert spontaneously yields them Some of these it is true are absolutely indigestible & others produce [such] dreadful pains in the inner men of those who are unaccustomed to them I have been obliged to have recourse to an emetic. Yet there are others by no means unsavoury esculents. I suppose custom makes them all savoury to them. Locusts & wild honey were as good as any thing I got. You remember this was the food of the Baptist. the locusts are better than the shrimps our good friend M^{rs} Sewell used to munch. Only they have just too much

[0008]

of a grassy taste, some swarms would were not make one believe in eating them that he had become a twin brother of old Nebuchadnezzar. I may mention that the the one ingredient of the Baptist food is dreadfully constipating & the other just the opposite. And had he lived in the desert of the Bakalihari he would have had no difficulty in finding a constant supply of both Of the one I saw no fewer than 19 swarms in one year & yet no particular damage was done to the crops of the natives, & had I followed all the calls of the honey birds which invited me to hives I should never have been without a sufficiency of the other - The Bakalihari were very kind to me But during most of that part of the journey I & my

three companions were dependent on my gun. Sometimes we had a pleasure you never knew, "We rejoiced [as] in the day of slaughter" At other times we had to feast on what we saw in our dreams only. The pleasure I enjoyed in sitting [with the natives of the desert] round the fire in the evenings & when listening to their wild tales introducing the story of the Great Salvation was greater than I ever before felt in this work. Occasionally our conversation on subjects connected with Eternity were prolonged till past midnight. I thus became better acquainted with their modes of thinking than I could otherwise have done May the Lord generously own my poor endeavours to make known his name to these poor wanderers in the wilderness.

[0009]

You may have heard that the Bechuana have no idea of a future state. I know this was the opinion of most missionaries untill lately. But we have discovered a parallel a form in which all their traditions are embodied and this shews clearly they have always had the idea of future existence. The knowledge of this parallel is universal, even among the poor Bakalihari it served as an excellent introduction to a conversation Perhaps you may like to hear it. It is as follows. The cameleon walks very slowly. The black lizard very quickly God sent the former with a message to men, saying, Go tell mankind that when they die they do not entirely perish their shade flies upward, they will again return, the lizard was sent afterwards with a message from the Devil (Barino or evil spirits) & being swift of foot outran the cameleon & came first to men. His message was When you die you die like the game, there is an end of you. You will never return. A messenger is coming after me to say when men die they will again return Dont believe him he tells lies only.

I had experienced some merciful preservations during my late tour. Seeing an animal on a tree one day I drew near for the purpose of securing it for our pot. But when within a few feet of some brushwood near the base of the tree, a tiger lurking there seized the little dog which preceded me & shook him as if it had been a mouse in his jaws. He at the same time growled horribly, which made me think it was a lion. I retreated a few steps in order to to take aim for flying is of no use in the case of a lion. He then came out from his covert & I got a good view of him. But as he did not seem to wish an encounter I was quite willing to be of the same mind & allowed him to move off into the forest Had I been first instead of the dog, it is probable I should

[0010]

have been seized instead of him. Thanks to the Lord for his care over me.

You remember the lofty black volcanic rocks of the Bakaa Well I was nearly starved there, a native who went with me last year was affected with fever while there. After our departure a report was spread that he had been poisoned The Bakaa were determined to give no cause for such an imputation in future & gave neither poisoned nor wholesome food, except a few watermelons & sweet reed for three mortal days. But I had reason to be thankful for the low diet they put me on, for when descending on the morning of the second day from their airy abodes to our sleeping place below, I unfortunately broke one of my finger bones The testament in my hand served as a point of resistance between which & the sharp angle of rock my finger was crushed, a piece of their sweet reed served as a splint & the low diet saved me from an attack of irritative fever. The chief & people were quite amicably disposed towards me But my patience could hold out no longer than the morning of the third day. When they saw us preparing to depart the chief & all his wives came down & entreated us not to depart. They did not wish to give food lest people should say they had poisoned us, they did not like us to go away without eating anything lest people should say they were niggardly & refused food to a stranger. For my part I was glad to get away from both them & their dilemma in order to get something to eat That same evening I got to the Makalaka & there got abundance. Their boiled beans were so good we awakened during the night again & again to eat them & I cut the very buttons off my trousers to give them as tokens of my gratitude. ~~they~~ we had tried a piece

[0011]

of rhinoceros skin roasted the day before but though my teeth are good it fairly beat me My jaws were quite tired ere I conquered two mouthfuls. I dont tell these things to make you pity me, I dont pity myself the pleasure of this work far outweighs the disagreeables of it. We sit here & tell tales such as these & laugh over them, I mention them to you that you may be entertained by the recital of the different things which happen to servants of the same master in different countries. You must not publish this, I wrote to a friend of mine quite a confidential letter & I was ashamed to see it afterwards flourishing in all the colonial papers & even in the English Record without a single emendation, the circumstances I state freely here I should not were it designed for the eye of the public I could tell you a long story about hunger &c. How I was almost dead in the wilderness & unable to trust my handkerchief which I was using as a hunger belt But

what about it. the men of the world suffer as
much & more than ever I did for the sake of the
gospel of Him who has done so much for me

But I must rush the story of the finger lest you
think it hindered me greatly, I can bear a little pain
pretty well so it did not require any attention. But
one night a lion approached very near to the bush
under which we were all fast asleep and then
commenced his hideous roaring. My ox leaped in
among us. My poor Bakwains shrieked for fear
& I half asleep & stupid seized a pistol with the disabled
hand but the rebound hurt me much more than
the bullet did the lion, it rebroke my bone. The
noise however made him move off. My poor

[0012]

fellows on seeing the blood again running said by
way of comforting me "You have hurt yourself but you
have redeemed us. Henceforth we will swear by you"
I wished they had felt the value of the blood which was shed for
the redemption of their souls. I had three such escapes
from lions. this last was the heaviest fellow I have
heard, I can resemble it to nothing better than the noise
made by the letting off the steam in a steam boat. If
there were some breaks in it, the likeness would be complete
as - — - —this journey on ox back was
more than 400 miles in length. the pleasures far
surpass the pains. Will you join me in thanksgiving
for the marvellous loving kindness of the Lord to one of the
least of all his servants No one had ever such
proof of his care & had such a cold heart afterwards
May he forgive me. And may he help me to devote my
whole being to His glorious service. O that my time may
not run to waste that I may do something for Him
who has done so much for me

Many many thanks for the Magazines Especially for
our own congregational. there's life in it now,
It's a living moving active thing. But formerly it was
as grave as a quaker & readable by people with spectacles
only I enclose a note respecting payment &c.
also one for M^{rs} Sewell who will inform you
of my reasons for doing so. Now as you get
up the mag. so well I give you the privilege of
being corrector of this parvum in multo letter
Put in all the words that are left out & put out all those
which ought never to have been in Affectionately yours
D Livingston