

Letter to Robert Moffat 2, 13 August, September, 30 September 1847

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[0001]

Kolobeng, Bakwain Country 13 August
1847
My Dear Brother

We recieved your favour dated Aug^t /46 while at Kuruman and returned at least in quantity an equivalent. Let this large sheet be added to the former and leave quality out of the question and you will never again be able to utter your complaint about "return letters" The circumstances in which I am at present placed and the object I have in view in writing at present are the following

The water of Chonuane being scanty and bad, and it being impossible for us to revise the staff of life in that locality we felt it to be our duty to propose removal to a more salubrious situation. Many of the Bakwains were opposed to it because Chonuane afforded good garden ground for native corn pumpkins &c. But Sechele declared he would cleave to us wherever we went and having fixed on the Kolobeñ, a fine stream which drains that mass of hills which lies Eastward of Kuakoe, we are now in process of removal thither - Our new station is at the point where the Kolobeñ emerges from the hills, and about 40 miles N.W. of Chonuane, I am engaged in erecting huts, Mebaloe alias David is thatcher and I am architect - Paul remains with M^{rs} L at Chonuane, the mass of the people are engaged in removing their corn & goods from stage to stage - others are engaged in building - Mary feels her situation among the ruins a little dreary & no wonder for she writes me yesterday that the lions are resuming possession & walk around our house at night - Kolobeng means the haunt of the wild boar but it seems to have been the haunt of everything wild. Hyaeanas abound exceedingly, buffaloes in immense herds - and zebras quite tame in the thickly wooded country around - Elephants too have left their traces on what will we hope for the future only contain marks of the "pleasant haunts of men" The evenings afford me a little time for writing &c - and as you express a wish to have a grammar of the language I intend in the absence of any grammar of Sitchuana deserving the name to furnish you with a few remarks and these I expect to be of more value to myself than to you - for I shall send them to Father and entreat him to correct my observations at the same time hoping he will add information on those point in which I am ignorant I need scarcely remark that it is of the utmost importance to attain an idiomatic aquaintance

with the channel through which we hope the strains of Divine mercy & consolation will flow to the benighted inhabitants of this region. I have heard it spoken by individuals who thought they had acquired a knowledge of it yet using the English idiom they could only be understood by natives who being accustomed to Europeans knew what was intended as well as the speakers themselves. Had they come to the Bakwains or to any of the interior tribes they would not be understood by a single individual - The English idioms here would be unintelligible gibberish In the following remarks I shall not attempt to follow gri ammareans - The endeavours of some to reduce the Sicuana to the grammatical forms of Latin & Greek &c seem to me to have

been complete failures - I shall attempt an analysis only and should I stick fast in the middle it will be because I lack either time or ability or both. We will begin by what we can between ourselves dignify by the name of a

Phonetic Table of the Sicuana

A is sounded as in Fāther Māmmā or scotch way of pronouncing latin ~~Arabie~~ example bathu, men

mālā bowels - mālā cold gonā there ñāpā (verb) pinch lithāko walls. logonā a hedge

E as in Pear, Were, their, ex, sepha brittle - senya (v.) destroy. Abeta v. pass, leta v. wait (or watch)

E' with accent as in Lemon clerk. Friend, Dead seka v. judge - étā travel réka v. buy. maséka leglets - seba v. backbite

I as in scotch Latin or English diminish believe or as seek peep seam. Kika a corn mortar Thipa a knife. Cosigo night Jurī a goat: Letsalsi - the Sun -

O as in Mole, Toad, Tlotla to honour. shotla v. mock kopa v. beg ~~lopa v. ask~~

Ō as in broad sought broth. Tlōtla strain (a liquid) Lōpa to ask

U as in cushion. cuckoo soothe Lekuka a milk sack - Phupu' a grave - ruta v. teach pula rain.

ae - diphthong as English I - in high lie alike Tsamaae v go raea say Tlatlatlaia

v. load a gun - put one thing into or on another - as putting a kettle on the fire &c Caēa v place or put as pono

[0002]

Oe diphthong as in -que or wig we is nearly the same in sound but scarcely so full in sound as be. Bakwena can be spelled so or Bakoena or Bakwaina or

Baquana - gague is pronounced as if spelled ~~with~~ gagwe (his) Leshue filthy, Sebegoe a thing found in the field

Sh. as in dish fish shall ~~Fr. J. in Jour~~ mashi milk sesheshe a blossom or flower Leshashe a coward. Shoñkoe a plant (asclepias?)

C as in Italian voce, or as ch in church lunch ç caka a battle axe coga rise cukūru a rhinoceros all pronounced as if spelled with ch. the last in English orthography would be Chāskooroo

Ñ with the circumflex over it is the same as the Spanish ñ or English ing in coming writing but in Sicuana it begins words as well as forms a frequent termination mo lehatsiñ in or on the earth - mo tseleñ in or on the way or path mo thutoñ in teaching mo nokenñ in the stream - all these are pronounced as if instead of ñ they were written ng - _____ ñoñola to mock or deride. ñoñorega grumble. Are pronounced as if written ngongola ngongorega taking the initial from any word ending in ing but allowing the i to be silent the enuntiation

G. guttural as in Scotch loch - dutch dag. x ~~the~~ scotch way - gago thy ñoñorega, riga throw down

H is always an aspirate except in combination with s as sh. Phiri a hyeana

the p is pronounced distinctly & followed by the rough breathing Ph is never f as in English

Of the sounds which occur less frequently in Sitchuana we have e like dutch ou or scotch way of pronouncing upsilon serumeri a chrystal motsekeri a sling - The Bakalihari have the dipthong we possess in rebuke they pron say bathu as if spelled batheu - Several letters interchange in different tribes and these constitute the chief diversities of dialect - T interchanges with R. Rara Thatha father the Bamapela or bagalaka say Papa. H interchanges with v. & v is used too instead of sh M tla shua M tla vua thou shalt die lehatse levatsi - L & N. interchange & the l is omitted in some words by certain tribes in which it is used by others. Ki tla tla Ki tā tā I shall come

The letters used in printing Sitchuana & which are quite sufficient for writing all the dialects are A B C D E É F G H I K L M N O P R S T U V X Y Ñ sounded as above - I shall now note a few words to shew you the importance of strict attention to the pronunciation of sicuana They may serve as examples on which to test the above observations

Mālā bowels

Mālā cold

Tlotla ^v· honour

Tlōtla ^v· stain(a liquid)

Pholo health or soundness

Polo the penis

Lopa to ask

Lōpa an obscure word

Poiho fear

Poio turning

Kopa beg

Khopa stubble or trip

Libe sins

Libi dried cow dung

Tsétla yellow

Tsetla the bladder

Tséga laugh

Tsega the covering of the
genitals (now descriptured)

Sept^r 30 We are all at present in
pretty good health - thanks to Him
who bestows this blessing - Our
temporary huts finished - school
nearly so - Will begin watercourse
in a day or two - Mary salutes you
& Helen kindly, & you may
believe us yours affectionately
D. Livingston -
If Sechele knew I was writing you he would
send many salutations I shall tell him I have sent
them for him tomorrow.

He goes early -

[0003]

The foregoing are what occur to me at the moment - Had I leisure it would be easy to shew you that

the most egregious blunders may be committed by the omission of the aspirate or by substituting

the long for the short O - the é for its neighbour e. In M^r Lemure's Proverbs there are no lack of

errors of the sort. Matlo adverts is the word invariably used for maitlo eyes. A native will know

what you mean if you make the a in Mātlo very long but never if pronounced matlo

Alaga v charm or heal, is printed halaha which has no meaning whatever - I once heard in a pico (peetsho) called for the purpose of proposing a missionary settlement in the tribe the following statement & it was reiterated on subsequent occasions although I pointed it out to the

individual by asking the meaning of the word of a native in his presence - "Jesus cleaved to our sins" the word cleaved gives but an imperfect idea of the force of the word shurelelela. It means adhere to or refuse to give up. As a man to his wife who having left him he follows and perseveres

in attempting to bring back. He meant to say "died for." I mention this for your own instruction I often think of it as a spur to myself to attain a better knowledge of the language

After the orthography which I conceive to be nearly perfect as a means of reducing the language - It will be well to direct to your attention to the system of signs the frequent repetition of which forms a remarkable feature in all the dialects - Probably that and the changes effected by prefixes form[...] its distinguishing characteristics as a tongue D^r Adamson of Cape Town thinks that the principle of repetition of signs explains their apparent complexity found in the tongues of barbarous nations, and that there is no necessity for the supposition that such complexity is an evidence that these tribes were formerly in a state of civilization - Nearly all the complexity of the Sicuana exists in the repetition of the signs of nouns - and the who for such an apparent prolixity seems to be - by carrying along ~~the~~ the sign through the sentence or through several sentences to impart perspicuity ^ & precision to the narrative - these signs cannot be translated into English except in some cases and then it is by - "That which" or "the" or "it" Any attempt to arrange them as pronouns would be a failure for there are true pronouns besides. Indeed I believe if a perfect grammar is ever made it will be by thinking as little as possible of the grammars of the Japetian tongues Before attempting to arrange them in classes I shall give you an example of common repetition The sign of motse a town is o

Ga re na motse mo hatsiñ

Re batla moñue kna gerini

Kua jesu o agañ goñā

Ko ona o re o batlañ

Ki motse o o tlotlegañ

Ki motse oa rona

The sign of motse is in moñue in the second line

Again three times over in the fourth & in the fifth

the word with its sign twice over - Examples might

easily be cited in which it is much more frequently

used than in this but in these it is quite untrans[-]

-lateable into the English*

[except by a multiplication of particles an extent which would prevent most Englishmen from understanding their own tongue] - Ga go e si go ko go utlualo

contains negatives and signs mixed together which if we attempt to translate literally would convey no idea to an English man but we know immediately as meaning "it was never heard of" Such sentences must have puzzled Father amazingly at first - We who follow in his wake can form but a faint idea of the sweat of brain he must have endured in picking & dissecting these particles

All nouns beginning with C.E.K.J.P.T.U. have e as their sign - x. Cakae a battleaxe Eñkho a pitcher Kañkashi e an oar. Tolo. a khoidoo Pitse a zebra - hita a wingless insect of domestic habits yet not respected Uñkoe tiger - you may make the above into a rule to assist memory. Initial Cektipu hath e. or any other cabalistic word you like to manufacture

Before proceeding to another lot you may remember that intial Cektipu forms the plural by the prefix "li" Licaka liñkho likañkashi litolo lipitse linta [...] liñkoe (there is a slight u sound in the latter & perhaps it ought to be spelled linũkoe the plural signs of this class are "li tse ri tsa" according to their position in the sentence - these four signs have the same meaning but ~~by~~ are varied ~~for~~ Euphony & ^ in expressing tense & case

Initial mo has o molao o a law. mosho o, morning [...] monyo dew [...] mōko chaff [...] [...]. - But mila a street mele the body have also O - probably in some of the dialects a street is called mola - & the body mole - Setibele has Motsila a street mo'mbila Mo inital forms the plural by changing into e melao mesho [...] mila, pl mebila - mele pl mebele

[0004]

Under this head may come [...] proper nouns or nouns expressing indiviuality - their signs are eo o

and the plural C Ca mothu an individual eo o. Cathu individuals ba - ba - It is remarkable that the natives apply individuality to Rhinoceros sessebes, ostriches swine and to all foreign articles, cukuru eo o, sessebe eo o, ince eo o kolohe eo o, Kettle eo o, pan eo o, &c & the plural bocukuru ba bossessebe ba ba boince ba bo kokolobe ba &c. In reference to foreign articles we object to follow the natives & say Kettle e pan e [...]e -

1 Any verb may be individualized by prefixing - mo & ba - and using these as the signs of the singular & plural respectively; or 2 by the word mothu with the sign in the genitive a [...] preceding

Rx 1 molosi, a fighter, balosi fighters, mothu oa tōo, a person of fighting - morisi a herd - barisi, mothu oa tisho, a person of herding - mopi from bopa to form or create babopi - mothu oa popo, mohumi bahumi from huma to be rich or become rich mothu oa khumo, a man of riches

-ness (mahumo pl - riches) moloi a witch baloi mothu ou tōo, morōka a rain doctor barōka, moroki a sewer baroki sewers &c &c.

The sign of the plural "me" is e. but metse, water, has a, the bakalahari say mādze a & that probably was the original form of the word. But I must now put a period to this and whether I ever resume or not will depend on circumstance -

Sept. We have now got into our hut on the Kolobeng - The town has as D^r Hamilton of Leeds

would say an oppidal appearance though still in process of building. Our corner although we are attempting only temporary buildings has assumed a touch of the European style Mebaloe

Paul Isaac & our man Friday (Morukanelo) have for the first time in their lives got up square huts of poles & reed - the chief without any suggestion from me - determined to erect the school. I desire said he that you be at no expense whatever, I wish to build a house for God who is the defence of my town, I shall call upon all the people to ^ cut wood &c it ~~must~~ will be my work

Care of T. J. Mathew Esq^{re} Cape Town

M^r Robert Moffat
Care of Miss Eisdell
7 Walworth Place
Walworth
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Livingston

You must go still farther N. or N.E. & try for yourself, there is plenty of room
itinerary is good if you have a permanent sphere - a focus

Kuruman 26th. My Dear Robert, I forward this
as rec^d? I have not a moment for remark - My
goal so far as it goes R.M.

He proposed likewise that after the school was built we should have an interchange of works he doing some work for us which required a number of men & we leaving that to him should put a square house together for his use. We were glad of the proposition for the making of a water course must be our first effort & will require aid - as the season is far advanced & we cannot well do without corn for two years everything now is of a temporary nature - the school must be so too, But we hope both chief & people will be as favourably disposed when we do need permanent buildings & this if they were as well as we could wish - Indeed better than we could have expected But the immortal souls - these are still in darkness & need your prayers & those of every believer in Jesus, to whom their state is known. A lady in the excess of her simplicity wrote to me requesting me to tell more of our success in order to stimulate her prayers, Poor ignoramus that I was I had told of the degradation into which so many precious immor[-] -tals had sunk and that the gospel had little or no effect in the Interior even when preached again & again, I thought this stimulus enough to any one who longed for that the glory of Jehovah

should dispel the clouds of darkness & death which cover the earth. But the longer one lives the

more one learns, All the success in Bechuana land belongs through the Divine favour to those who preceded us in the field, We are beyond their line of things to have ^ as yet seen none