

## Letter to James R. Bennett, 30 June 1843

*Livingstone, David, 1813-1873*

Published by Livingstone Online ([livingstoneonline.org](http://livingstoneonline.org))

[0001]

[[END OF LETTER IS]

Kuruman 30<sup>th</sup> June 1843

[16]

[MS.10708 F. 11]]

My Dear Sir

Your most welcome letter I found a few days ago on returning from a tour in the Interior, and I assure you the perusal of it afforded me a great amount of enjoyment. Every topic to which you advert is interesting, indeed everything from home is peculiarly so. Just like cold water to a thirsty soul, so you must not imagine it was unworthy "a passage accross the Atlantic" I thank you heartily for it and earnestly hope you may find it convenient soon to give me just such another

I am not surprised you have not seen any account of my labours in *the magazine*, the reasons are, I am not yet settled, the Directors expecting their M<sup>r</sup> Moffat would soon follow instructed me to remain at Kuruman till his arrival, and this in oder to obtain the benefit of his local knowledge of the country in the choice of a suitable location for a new mission. M<sup>r</sup> ( M )'s departure having been delayed my labours have been mixed with those of the elder missionaries. Good has been done but as I believe it has been effected chiefly through the instrumentality of my predecessors I have not felt at liberty to advert to it in *my letters* to the Directors except in a vague & general manner; I have also examined the country for myself & been much farther into the Interior than any other European & preached the glad tidings of mercy beyond every other man's line of things But these labours have [^] [been] all of a preparatory nature. Nothing permanent has been effected. But now in company of M<sup>r</sup> Edwards of this mission I expect very soon to commence a station among the Bakhatla, they are situated very near the spot where M<sup>r</sup> Campbell faced about to go home and, the iron founderies which he heard of but was not permitted to see belong to them. The reason he was forbidden the sight of them was a foolish idea that his presence would bewitch the iron. No one dare approach them who has had intercourse with the other sex since the commencement of the season in which they work it. He would certainly bewitch it, I who am yet in a state of single blessedness can examine them as

I like, and I assure you it is difficult to maintain my gravity when I see iron bewitched. If they use their bellows too briskly having no lime in their furnaces, the iron becomes burned to a cinder. They take out that & looking upon it in consternation exclaim behold the effects of witchcraft. The evidence is so clear no one doubts it. They then apply a double portion of their prophylactic against witchcraft & begin the process again

This is a *parvum in multo letter* but you must its many blunders, my sentences sometimes come tailforwards as in  
Sichuana & require many corrections Will you be so kind as [to] present my Christian regards to your much respected father & mother & to your partner with whom I hope you will long live in much domestic happiness,

Believe me Yours affectionately

( D) Livingston

[0002]

Our station will be about a day beyond the spot where Mosilikatze was seen by M<sup>r</sup> Moffat. I lately walked over the site of his town & the field where he suffered such a dreadful defeat by a handful of Dutch boors, the grass had recently been burned off the country so I could obtain a good view of the whole and a very few human bones were all I could discover of what belonged to the tyrant. He is still alive & continues his career of blood. He lives at a distance at least 300 miles north east of that now. But last year he sent out a marauding party to the Bakwain, Wanketze & other tribes and there committed great excesses upon them Besides great slaughter of the males they plundered these tribes of all their cattle & took many of the women & children captive Makabba who was the terror of the Interior in M<sup>r</sup> Campbell's time has been succeeded by a son called Sebegwe, who is the bravest of all the Bechuanas. Mosilikatze could never overcome him for he retired into the great Bakalihari desert & there by his tactics cut off detachment after detachment of Mosilikatze's people, sometimes he finished them so completely not one returned to tell the tale. Last year when I was in the Bakwain country Sebegwe sent messengers to me to say that he was now anxious to leave the desert & return to his own country & requested me to tell him if it might be a safe movement. I told him although the people of Mosilikatze had been driven away many of the Batlapi (people of Kuruman) refused the gospel & having now got guns would certainly attack him for the sake of his cattle. Several of the believers of Kuruman happened to be in that country at the time when ( S.) contrary to

my advice did leave the desert, they visited him & were most kindly recieved but unfortunately during the very time of their visit Mahura with his Batlapi pounced upon them The people of Sebegwe being quite unused to guns fled in dismay & the Batlapi murdered as they chose The believers although commanded by Mahura to fire refused obedience to their chief on the ground that they served a higher master than he. But as they are Batlapi a most injurious prejudice was excited in the minds of all the natives in the Interior against the *gospel* by the circumstances in which they were placed at the time. A gun had been fired the night previous to the attack This Sebegwe thought must have been the signal by which these believers apprised Mahura of his situation. The singing at family worship their incantations for success, and the fact that one of the party a deacon in the church here was in the act of collecting the people for worship (it being Sabbath morning when the attack was made) when the

[0003]

shout of war was heard was considered by all the heathen as only a [17] pretext by which to aid the work of slaughter. The believers it was universally believed had been the betrayers of the brave Sebegwe. The object of my last tour which commenced on the 21<sup>st</sup> ( Feb'y) last was by my presence & explanations to disabuse the minds of the heathen & particularly that of Sebegwe of the unfavourable impression recieved. He with the remains of his tribe live at a village 10 days ( N E) of this & near to the towns of the Bakhatla The driver of my waggon was one of the party of believers above referred to. When I entered the village Sebegwe with his remaining warriors was seated on the ground I squatted down beside him But neither looks nor words betokened complacency to my driver who during a most uproarious recognition looked anything but comfortable. Sebegwe demanded of me why I had destroyed all his people & stolen all his cattle. I being a Scotchman returned for answer Why did you refuse to listen to my advice & then destroy yourself. His messenger of last year then recognized ~~him~~ me & we were soon good friends He said he had lost so many of his people by fever, while [in] the neighbourhood of the Lake Mokhorro He had not a sufficiency to attend to his vast herds of cattle and his desire to sow corn again with his ignorance of the power of guns [^] [had] induced him to leave the desert contrary to my advice. During the whole of my visit he behaved in a most friendly manner, one instance I may relate Having arrived on a Saturday I explained the nature of the following day & desired to have an opportunity to address his people, next morning before daybreak I heard his herald proclaiming the chief's orders that no one should do anything that day but "pray to God & listen to the words of the foreigner" At the different services he seemed much interested & frequently asked sensible questions

concerning the strange things I had brought to his ears. By the way I may mention here that fevers seem the greatest barrier to the evangelization of Africa we have. A short distance beyond my farthest point north there is a fresh water lake call[ed] Mokhoror or the lake of the boat on account of the canoes which are found upon it. The banks are level with the water & the surrounding country flat, Hippopotami alligators, fish &c abound in it. Bamboo & other reeds ~~abound~~[grow] on its banks. There fevers abound, and this lake stretches away an immense distance to the North East & south west. A small boat carried to it would be an excellent mode of exploring a large portion of the interior. Many nations

[0004]

live upon its banks & trade upon its waters. They are armed with guns which they procure from Portuguese on the East coast. I hear M<sup>r</sup> Moffat intends visiting this lake I hope he wont fall a victim to its fever. Last year a strong native who accompanied me was siezed with it & I had great difficulty in getting him through it. The effects however are still apparent upon him. This to the North & ( N.W.) and then to the ( N.) East we have a fly which bites the oxen and the very first rain that falls afterwards seems to excite its poison to activity for they all die. Several traders have lost every one of their oxen by them. And then towards the coast at De Lagoa Bay fevers are exceedingly fatal, Several parties of boors have been cut off by them, I have anxiously looked for an account of that which cut off so many of the Niger expedition in order to compare it with this case of it which I saw. But it has not appeared in any periodical that has come my way yet

After parting with Sebegwe I went northwards to the Bakw[-]ain country which is situated on the tropic & meeting some of the escaped captives there my people would go no farther. The idea of going near Mosilikatze was too much for them Their hearts were ready to die within them so I left them in charge of the waggon & proceeded on oxback. I think I see you smile at the idea of such a conveyance. It is rough travelling as you can concieve. The skin is so loose there is no getting ones great coat which has to serve for both saddle & blanket to stick on And then the long horns in front with which he can give one a punch in the abdomen if he likes make us sit as "bolt upright" as a dragoons. In this manner I travelled more than 400 miles. I visited the Bamangwato Bakaa & Makalaka and many villages of the poor enslaved Bakalihari which but for this mode of travelling I should never have seen. These villages are usually so far in the desert no waggon can approach them. They are much oppressed by the other Bechuana tribes All the skins which the other tribes sew into Karosses are procured by them & yet they can scarcely

keep as much of what they kill as cover their oxen  
bodies. They always live far from water in order to avoid coming  
in contact with their masters. (the other tribes consider them inferior)  
yet their wants are wonderfully supplied by Providence. They  
have shown me between 40 & 50 different kinds of roots &  
more than 30 different kinds of fruits which they use as food  
& some of them are by no means unsavoury. They were more  
attentive to my instructions than any other which made me feel much a[s]

[0005]

interested in them. The other tribes mentioned above live on the summits of  
a range of lofty bleak basaltic rocks, once the scene of active volcanic  
operations. When standing on their tops we see in every direction immense  
cup shaped cavities, some of them as large as Finsburys Square & about  
300 feet deep, their flat bottoms are covered with vegetation but  
their almost perpendicular sides have not yet formed a vegetable mantle.  
While on the outside patches of the same colour & destitute of vegetation  
take the form of streams running down to the plains below, some  
end in a point half way down the hill, others gain the bottom & then  
spread out just as we may suppose streams of lava would do.  
These rocks are rent & riven in every direction. The huge angular  
fragments which have slipped down have by impinging on each  
other & the rocks below formed innumerable cavities and into these  
the Bamangwato, Bakaa & Makalaka fly for shelter from their  
fierce enemies the Matibele of Mosilikatsze. One which I entered  
could hold a hundred individuals, & the entrance was so small &  
crooked a dozen men within could stand & defend it against the  
ingress of a single individual, crawling in on all fours. Into another  
a whole village entered, & when the Matibele besieged one entrance  
the people had another by which at night they went to draw  
water & bring wood for cooking. The Bakaa have a bad name  
among all the other tribes because a few years ago they killed  
a trader & all his people by poison. When I visited them last year  
I saw pieces of his gun locks, tin jugs & sailcloth of his waggon  
worn as ornaments by them. Last year a native who was  
with me became ill during our visit to them, the man himself &  
all the other tribes believe he was poisoned. I however do not believe  
it for I saw symptoms of indisposition before we arrived there.  
The Bakaa determined this year to give us nothing at all & thus  
avoid a similar imputation. There was no game near so we  
had to feast for two days on the delectable things we saw  
in our dreams. This low diet had a good effect on me for  
when descending their lofty rocks after having addressed them  
I felt so much interested in the questions they were putting  
concerning what they had heard I forgot for a moment  
where I was going and then feeling as if about to fall  
made a violent effort to save myself. But though I succeeded  
I struck my hand with so much violence on a sharp angle  
as produced a compound fracture of the finger bone. The testam[-]  
ment served as a rest between which & [^] [the rock] my finger was  
injured, & a very good splint was made of a piece of reed. The

fasting I suppose prevented irritative fever and although I did not rest a day on account of it, it was about to heal kindly But one night a lion began to roar most tremendously & very near to the bush at which we were all fast asleep. It was nearer than from your room in the dispensary to the open street My ox leapt in among us. My poor Bakwains shrieked for fear and I half awake & stupid siezed a pistol with the disabled hand fired at the monster but the rebound rebroke my finger. When we got him driven away the poor Bakwains (three of that tribe went with me as guides my own people being all with the waggon) seeing the

[0006]

blood running, said, "You have hurt yourself but you have redeemed us Henceforth we shall swear by you" O that they knew the value of the blood which was shed for the redemption of their souls. The second fracture was worse than the first but as I can bear a little pain pretty well it did not hinder me so much as I expected it should It prevented my obtaining provisions by my gun, and the whole party being entirely dependant on it we should have been put to shifts had it not been for the kindness of the Bakalihari. They generously gave what food they had, and although some of it is absolutely indigestible & undergoes no alteration by being subjected to the actions of the stomach, I never enjoyed better health. I dont remember ever to have seen the physiological effects of the food of John the Baptist X [ *[Note: I dont suppose the Baptist lived constantly on locusts &c but suppose he had if the locusts were as plentiful as here he would find no difficulty in obtaining a constant supply[.] In less than a year I have seen 18 swarms besides others not yet furnished with wings & no damage was done to the crops worth speaking of]* ] noticed by comentators. The locusts are the most constipating food I ever ate. They taste just like the vegetables on which they subsist, generally more like the soft juicy part of a stalk of wheat which perhaps you may have tasted & far better than shrimps at home. The wild honey has the very opposite tendency, the two combined form one [of] the best kinds of food the Bakalihari have. We find the honey by means of a bird the skin of which I shall send you They call us by a peculiar kind of chirping & following it we very seldom are disappointed. I have followed them 4 or 5 miles & when hungry was sure of finding a meal at the spot she pointed out. I have resolved to deviate from your instructions respecting sending anything large. I intend sending with the other things a skin of a springbuck. It is the most beautiful of all the antelope tribe & will make an elegant ornament to your recieving room. It is as large as a greyhound but I am sure when you see it you will not grudge it a corner. To the other things I shall make additions and as soon as a conveyance can be got down to the Bay (Algoa) I shall dispatch them for you. I send in the course of a few months a box to Rev<sup>d</sup> E. Williams of Hankey who has been obliged to go home on account of Tracheitis or something of that nature. I shall desire him to hand you a Kaross which I shall be obliged to you to accept as a

token of my remembrance untill I can send you something more substantial. It will make a comfortable covering for your study chair in winter, or a lining for the cloak of your little boy. Your very kind offer as to the medicines, instrum[en]ts &c I shall gladly avail myself of as I purchase them at a great disadvantage at the Cape. But as I have lately obtained a supply it will be next year before I take the liberty of writing you on that subject.

I must now advert to the other topics in *your letter* but I am ashamed to send so much egotism as is contained in the above but perhaps you will be able to glean something of the state of the country from what I have said. We are not

[0007]

gentlemen missionaries but rough it wherever we go. And we do not grudge our efforts if they will only conduce to the advancement of our Redeemer's glory. When I first saw the manner in which the native women carry their children ( viz.) slung on the back with the head exposed [to] the piercing rays of the sun I felt certain that affections of the head should be of frequent occurrence. I have however never met with a single case of either congestive or inflammatory affections of the brain; the above custom put me on the "look out" for Hydrocephalus but have not as yet observed one case in the least degree resembling that disease. On enquiring amongst the missionaries who have paid most attention to disease I find it is exceedingly rare among the natives children while among the children of Europeans it is as common as meningitis During a period of twelve years Mrs Edwards a very accurate observer of these matters has only seen one case of it. Having seen the disease [in European children] & being well acquainted with its symptoms I think her testimony can be relied on. Whilst during a shorter period of observation and among the Mission families (French & English) not amounting to 40 individuals in all I am informed no fewer than 4 infants have fallen victims to that disease. You remark "that it is probable Hydrocephalus does not often appear among the natives" from this & other corroboration of your view which my enquiries seem to elicit I infer whatever your views of the cause of that disease may be they seem to be correct. I feel most anxious to know what they are & next time I write I shall remember yours for the sake of ascertaining

With respect to consumption, I saw it prevailing very extensively among the Hottentots especially those near the sea coast. This ~~region~~ [district] is reputed in the colony as peculiarly favourable for the cure of that disease. I have made many enquiries on the subject & the only reasons for the idea are the follow[ing] Two individuals are reported to have been nearly in the last stage but having removed to this part of the country now lost every symptom of Phthisis & are now living in perfect health. One is a Hottentot & the other a Motchuana, the

former I have not seen but the latter I had under my care for enlargement of the right ovary with shooting pains & tenderness in the situation of the other. She [^] [told me] [she] got married soon after her arrival here from the colony, became pregnant & was delivered of a still born child before the usual period Soon after that event pains commenced in the right ovary & not long after that she felt the tumour which was ~~now~~ [^] [at commencement of my treatment last year] about the size of a large fist, & visible to the eye on looking at the abdomen, and it continued to increase for several years. About twelve months before I saw her the pains shifted from the right to the left, but, no swelling took place. I gave her Lugol's solution of iodine internally in large doses, with occasionally a Plummer's pill, and applied a large mercurial plaster over the situation of the tumour and in the space of three months the pains in the left & swelling in the right had entirely disappeared. I examined the lungs frequently with the stethoscope but could discover nothing to indicate they had ever been the seat of

[0008]

tubercle. I was at first disposed to think that possibly her former medical attendant had been deceived in his diagnosis & that the case might have been one of Bronchitis rather than of Phthisis But I find she was under the care of Dr Chalmers of Algoa Bay, who seems well acquainted with the use of the stethoscope, one of his own lungs being completely condensed - the effect of pleuritis, & the other frequently attacked with bronch[-]itis have led him to a careful investigation of lung diseases. So there is the less probability of a mistake having been made. I ought to have mentioned that [it] is now 9 or 10 years since she left the colony on account of bad health. She is now strong & if I could in answer to her importunate begging, give her medicine to enable her to get a child she would be one of the happiest of women. Perhaps this case may be accounted for by the same mode of reasoning as the arrest of the progress of consumption for a time by pregnancy. The salubrity of the climate helping to complete the cure. Among Bechuanas I have only seen one case of consumption, she lives about 50 miles from this & has been about 2 years ill & is now much spent. I regret I have not had an opportunity of treating her, for if any climate would assist the curative effects of medicines I believe this would. It is dry, not excessively hot during summer & the winters are bracing. It differs much from that of the Interior And a journey is almost always beneficial to ~~ind~~ invalids. The Indian officers who come here are usually quite fat before they come this length, the chief excellence of this climate I conceive are its dryness & almost entire absence of sudden changes of temperature. The cold weather comes on very gradually & when it is warm during summer the nights are also warm & except immediately after rain which however seldom falls we never see dew. I slept during my oxback journey for three weeks and 4 days on the sand with only my great coat over me & a little grass under & yet I never once caught a cold. I wonder our missionaries don't come here I have not seen one well marked case of scrofula among Bechuanas. One resembled it but I am not sure he was of pure Bechuana blood. Among Griquas &



Hottentots it is common. I shall write you again soon  
& give you some information concerning plants diseases &c

~~Care of Revd Dr Phillip Cape Town~~  
( Jas) ( R.) Bennett. M.D.  
24 Finsbury Place  
Finsbury Square  
London