

Letter to Joseph J. Freeman, 23 September 1841

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[0001] Kuruman 23rd September 1841

Dear Sir

That I might be able in my first communication to inform the Directors respecting my prospects of usefulness in the cause of Christ amongst the Heathen I have delayed announcing my arrival at Kuruman for a period of nearly two months. We came hither on the 31st July and received a most cordial welcome from the bretheren Hamilton and Edwards, the warmth of it awakened in my bosom feelings of fraternal affection to both and these subsequent intercourse has tended much to increase

As it is in accordance with my own long cherished desire and the intentions of the Directors that my chief energies should be directed to the evangelization of the tribes in the Interior the mode in which this can best be effected has become a topic of intense interest in many conversations, we have had together. The decision of the Directors, from judgements matured by long experience is that an extensive native agency is the most efficient mode of spreading the gospel. In this decision most of the missionaries I have seen fully concur, The question therefore where are these to be got for the extensive field beyond us has become to me one of peculiar interest, Whilst in England I had formed the opinion that great things might be done by means of this mission, - that it might be formed into a sort of focus from which might diverge in every direction the beams of Divine truth but after

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having personally inspected most of the surrounding localities in connexion with this station I am compelled partially to relinquish the hope in so far as very extended operation are concerned, the great desideratum is a want of population, There is no want of success considering the smallness of the number who usually attend the preaching of the word, nor can we consider even the attendance small when we remember the paucity of people actually within a reasonable distance of the church. What in England we should call a fair proportion pay respect to the gospel by their presence and a larger proportion still give gratifying evidence of attachment to its principles by their

walk and conversation. But the population being small even although there is a large proportion of believers there must be a small number qualified if with nothing more with only the willing mind to endure hardship for the benefit of their fellow men. I should not have called your attention to this which appears the only unfavourable feature in the mission had there been any probability of an increase of population. The cause of the steady decrease instead of augmentation of inhabitants has been in operation for a great number of years, the Interior is quiet, as the gospel extends its influence peace will become more permanent and unless the Bechuanas entirely relinquish their present mode of life, - hold something else in estimation as their chief riches than cattle. We cannot expect that Kuruman will ever become populous. Regard for the welfare of their cattle will always lead them to choose more healthy locations for them than what this district presents.

That the Directors may judge whether my fears are well grounded I may mention that within a circle of 8 or 10 miles around the station there are not a thousand inhabitants. The total number of native houses, (occupied & unoccupied) on this station is 185, at least should be deducted for the unoccupied or used only as sort of storerooms and sleeping apartments for the unmarried females

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But if we take this number and take as an average the highest from frequent personal inspection I should say we can possibly give, avg. 5. We have only 925 as the total number of men, women and children. The above average exceeds by 2 that usually taken by the French missionaries in estimating the population around them. There is however a much larger population about 16 miles off. Probably there are in that location 1500 souls, Amongst whom also the gospel has met with considerable success, In another direction about 30 or 35 miles distant there are two villages each containing from 150 to 200 inhabitants.

Although the population is small in this district there is no want of inhabitants farther to the North and North-East. At Taons (pronounced Towns) which lies about East by North of this Mr Owen of the Church Missionary Society estimated the population at 15 or 20,000, the brethren itinerate thither although it is nearly 100 miles distant and though but little positive success has attended their endeavours the prospect is cheering, the truth is working its way and will soon prevail, even the violent opposition manifested in encouraging for anything is better than stupid indifference.

In view of the limited choice we are reduced to at this station I may be allowed to suggest that we make the most

of whatever agents we can find, Although desirable that they have somewhat more than decided piety it is I conceive not absolutely necessary, Evils may arise from their ignorance and mistakes but good will certainly be done and I should hope it will abide while the effects of their deficiencies will vanish before more efficient agents whom they themselves may now be instrumental in partially preparing, Making the most of every man under them seems to have been the reason, by the blessing of God, of the great success of the bretheren at Griqua Town

I purpose accompanying Br. Edwards in his journey to the Interior as I am informed by the bretheren who are best able to judge it will be advantageous for me in many respects. I shall become better acquainted with the habits of the people, their language and by exclusion from

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from all European society for some time I hope to slip more readily into their mode of thinking which is essentially different from ours. M^r Edwards seems intimately acquainted with native character and there is little fear but we shall be kindly received more especially by those who have again & again sent messages for missionaries, There is reason to believe that the [] [names] of Hamilton, Edwards & Moffat are well known hundreds of miles beyond us as the nomadic habits of the people very much favours the transmission of news - We take with [^] [us] two of the best qualified of our members here for the purpose of planting them as native teachers in some promising locality, the expenses of one of whom (if I do not receive in time the concurrence of D^r Phillip), I shall endeavour to defray myself. the work is urgent. souls are perishing: and what more efficient introduction can there be, for the new missionaries which I hope will soon follow us, than the residence for some months previously of one or two native teachers

I am exceedingly gratified to observe the confidence which has been inspired into the minds of the Bechuanas of the efficacy of our medicines . by a very successful care of treatment which happened a day or two after our arrival. The bretheren say it is altogether unprecedented and an unsuccesfull case since has not in least abated their confidence. I feel thankfull and hope it will by the blessing of God, enable [^] [me] to win their attention to a much more important topic than the preservation of their bodies, even the salvation of their immortal souls.

Faithfully & Affectionately
yours
David Livingston

Care of Rev^d D^r Phillip, Church Square
Cape Town
Rev^d J. J. Freeman

Mission House
Bloomfield St.
London