

Letter to James Macle hose, 8 December 1841

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Kuruman 8th Dec^r 1841

My dear friend

having lately travelled in company with Rev^d R. Edwards a distance between 6 & 700 miles in the interior of this country and visited many tribes Bechuanas some never before seen by missionaries, I lose no time in transmitting you some information respecting the state & prospects of the cause of Christ among them.

The Bechuanas you are already aware are divided into a great many distinct tribes or clans and they extend a great way into the Interior. Many of them have not yet been visited by any European, the language of the whole is however essentially the same varying less in proportion to the extent of country they occupy than do the different dialects in the provinces of our own empire. The feudal system of government obtains amongst them in all its glory and in many respects they resemble the Ancient Highlanders. Each clan is governed by its own chieftain who comes into office by right of birth and although hereditary succession produces just the same effects here as in more civilized countries, each chief looks upon himself as a wiser & better man than all [of] his tribe and superior to all his contemporaries. He has the power of Life & death - the administration of the laws and many prerequisites of office. Although he has councillors who in public assemblies are allowed by law to use the greatest freedom of speech towards him, yet all the people are in a state of abject subjection to his authority. The different tribes possess with respect to each other feelings similar to those of the chiefs to their fellows. One tribe calls itself a race of kings & superior to all others while a neighbouring tribe indulges the same lofty pretensions to superior dignity in the scale of humanity. This clannish pride has fortunately vanished considerably during the last 10 years or so but previous to that period it stood at such a height. It was hardly possible for missionaries to endure it. No foreigners were could be equal in point of wisdom &c. to the royal Bechuanas, consequently to deal with them a large stock of patience & self denial were requisite [needed] and these seem to have been possessed in the requisite degree by Read, Hamilton &c. Those devoted pioneers of this Mission who have now grown old [grey] in their work of faith & labour of love. At present only the remnants of this haughty spirit prevail. Very few consider themselves equal to foreigners and we can now travel through the whole country without fear of molestation.

The question now becomes one of interest, to what is this favorable change to be attributed? and to us whose prejudices are on the side of the gospel it would be pleasant could we place it to the account of the operation of that mighty agent But when we take a retrospective glance at the events which have transpired in this country within the last 20 years and examine the state & feelings of those who have been most in contact with Missions and those also who on account of their distance know nothing at all about these things we shall be compelled to give the credit of the change to an instrumentality far less to be admired But while we cannot feel any complacency in the instrument [0002]

or the operations we cannot help adoring the superintending Providence of Him who has in all ages & countries carried on his purpose right through heart of human wickedness & constantly brought good out of evil And since in this country a great good has followed the horrid scourge of war ~~may~~[one] we ~~not~~ be justified in turning our eyes with intense interest to another large portion of the world, long shut against the gospel, where war is now actually in progress, and confidently expect that however unjustifiable the pretext for that may be, it will eventually turn out for the advancement of that ~~place~~[kingdom] which consists of righteousness & peace. [The finder of the Bechuanas rendered them one once nearly as insensible to the gospel as the laves in China [...]]

At a time when pride & arrogance were rampant amongst the Bechuanas a large swarm of marauders more savage than they camr pouring down [from the interior] upon those nearer to the colony. Their cruelties & successes spread terror though the whole country, one tribe fell before them after another untill they were thought invincible by the thousands of fugitives who flocked towards the south; But a few mounted Griquas with guns succeeded in routing the whole with immense slaughter of the invaders & scarcely any loss to themselves

By & bye came another swarm more dreadful than the former under Moselekatsi, they spared none except the young men who were capable of being soldiers. The old men with the women & children were all cruelly butchered. As in the former case those who [could]escape fled in terror in this direction and Moselekatse following came with 2 miles of Kuruman. There, having ventured to capture the waggons of some Boers & put some of them to death he aroused the vengeance of their relatives who although a mere handful in number routed & compelled him to retire far into the Interior. There successive defeats of powerful marauders have contibuted more towards producing an impression of the superiority of Europeans than anything else. This applies more especially to the tribes who have not been subjected to the scourge of European warfare. What the effect is in the minds of the people of Moselekatse I have not had an opportunity of ascertaining. Most probably they are "chafed in their minds" and the possibilty of our intercourse with them may for a long time be retarded.

Those tribes which in the time of danger flocked around the mission stations have ~~mostly~~[all] retired, not so far inland as they formerly were. The terror of Moselekatse's name was still everywhere, fresh in their minds preventing ~~their~~[them]~~return northwards~~. But there is one unfortunate feature in the character of all the tribes who have been within the sphere of missionary operations they know somewhat of the requirements of the gospel but they are all decidedly averse to it. Those tribes who have never been near missionaries always behaved with more respect & kindness than those who had. At a point 250 miles nearly directly north, the people had never before seen a white face. There they were all we could expect a savage nation to be & forcibly reminded us of those in a similar state in the South Seas There was no begging, no [...]

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After [having] overcome their fears [sufficiently]~~of that first approach sufficiently~~ they gazed in astonishment at everything they saw & then brought presents of milk &. When we went into the town the women peeped past the corners untill we approached nearer & when they fled into the houses - the children screamed in terror - and the very dogs wanted not to bark but were as precipitate in their flight as if they had seen a lion, (the chief of this place too was the most sensible of this kingly tribe I have seen amongst them. For in general they are regular fools) Another tribe which received us courteously was found busily employed in the manufacture of large wooden bowls, each bowl being hollowed out from the section of a large tree, costs an immense deal of labour, in addition to this they were smelting iron for knives spears axes' & This manufacture seemed in its crudest state. Indeed it seems in their hands to be exactly in that state I suppose Tubal Cain left it. the furnace is built of clay, two leathern bags with clay tubes to enter the furnace, a piece of the bark of a tree bent upon itself, and a huge stone grasped in both hands constitute the bellows, tongs, hammer & another stone the anvil of these antediluvian [...] [artificers] in iron. the ore in abundance they find in the neighbouring mountains. To make up for the want of knowledge in the manufacture & frequent in burning the iron to a cinder, they have many superstitions such as abstinence from connubial intercourse for several months during which they work the iron &c. &c. There are also manufactures of brass copper & tin amongst them but these have more superstitions still Indeed the further we went towards the north we found superstition increasing & probably it does increase untill we reach the region where idols are worshipped

All whom we visited far in the interior treated us with great respect & listened attentively to the preaching of the gospel, this attⁿ of course can be attributed to nothing but the effect of novelty But I am persuaded they are much more\likely to receive the gospel than those who live within 100 or 150 miles of this & who generally now merit the appellation of scorers & refector of the truth

You may be surprised to hear that the state of matters exists amongst those who lately lived near mission stations. But what else can be expected from heathens in their sins only occasionally hearing a detached sermon or two. ~~If we~~ Before we can reasonably hope for much success the truth must be brought to bear repeatedly on the mind of the same individual. the heathen are in a totally different position from people at home - there, a single sermon may convert But here it is hardly possible for the truth to find its way through the thick darkness which shrouds the mind of the natives by any means but a continually pouring it upon them. And after all our chief hope is in the young, but little comparatively can or has been done with the old. You must not imagine from the style of the foregoing remarks that I in the least disparage the labours [0004]

of the devoted bretheren who have long laboured amongst these people the it has not been from any defect in their preaching that the unfortunate state of the tribes immediately beyond us has resulted. It has been from the want of means to carry on more extensive operations - their efforts for want of more agents have been so much confined to one spot occasionally visits have been made to the interior But for want of others to supply their places at the station these attempts have been too desultory in their nature to result in much good. It would require many missionaries at different points in the country before the great body of the people can be influenced, this defining for want of labourers still exists and unless the society can send out some more labourers there is only one [other] hope left. I mean the employment of native agents by private Christians at home To ascertain if you can do anything at all for us in this respect is my object in writing to you. I don't expect upi to publish this though you were kind enough to request me to write so use for that purpose. It is too full of inaccuracies for that. But I hope you may find it convenient to do something with the [...] information it contains - To shew the advantage of native agency amongst the people [I mention] a fact which every day stares me in the face. It has all along been the practice of the Griqua town missionaries to employ native teachers as soon as they were capable of doing anything in the work. This ~~plan~~ plan was not thought advisable by the bretheren here, the consequence has been the Griqua mission has augmented and stretched out on every side untill now they have more than 20 native agents, at work & all the people * on the ~~three~~[2 1/2] sides of Kuruman are under their instruction viz. South & S. East & West [& some far to the North West] and the missionaries can now do little else than [itinerate &] superintend them. We have an open door left for us only towards the North. During the period of prosperity ~~the~~ of the G. Mission, this stood almost stock still untill M^r Moffat went to England, finding the current there strongly in favour of native agency he appears to have changed his views a little for he wrote back again instructing the bretheren here to make a trial of two. These are stationed one at a village 16 miles off northwards the other much farther to the North East & now although it is only a few years since they were appointed

each has many more members under him than on the station here. And they are more consistent in their walk and so kind to each other it is quite a treat to visit them after living sometime with those here. The chief accessions to the church have also been from their ministry, and indeed this was to be expected for the truth seems to find its way to the heart much sooner from their lips than from a foreigner. In their hands it is divested of that peculiar strangeness which always attaches to foreigners in every country but more especially among the uncivilized That native teachers have been planted amongst the tribes which are now the avowed enemies of the gospel who only

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could have instructed the children [to read] & brought hoemt eh truths of the Gospel repeated in their own simple affectionate way. We might now have beheld a very different race of people, - at present most of them would refuse a native teacher, I mean those with 100 miles of us but not so with the tribes beyond They would gladly receive them not however because the chiefs love the gospel Of this they are entirely ignorant But simply because they imagine as yet that it would be a good thing to have the whites as their friends & it would add to their importance a little. They are not yet contaminated by traders Griquas &c. But they soon will be if something is not [...] done for I found in [each of] three tribes 2 persons who had been infected with the venereal disease from a Griqua who lately visited them, O I wish much & in this wish the bretheren Hamilton & Edwards cordially ~~agr~~ join, that I we could place some of our Christians amongst these people that the blessings of Christianity & civilization may be given them before the further spread of some of the worst accompaniments of more refined society, there is enough of disease amongst them already, many a sad case I saw without the power of contributing effectually to the relief of the sufferer on account of the shortness of our visit. I had no idea previously that disease existed to such an extent in uncivilized life. At one small town I had about 40 really bad cases brought to me, some scarcely able to crawl, the chief himself was laid up of ophthalmia & some of the cases in the houses were really the personifications of abject misery. Some come great distances for my medical advice, they fully appreciate the value of medicine for bodily maladies O that the Spirit may be poured out upon them to make them value before it is too late the Great Physician of souls. As it is however i could travel to any distance in the character of a medical man & be every where well received, but in that capacity chiefly they quite besieged my waggon when in the Interior, this liberty of access I should be glad to employ for any friend who should feel it his duty to employ a native teacher. If you

know anyone willing to contribute so much more than they are already doing to the cause of Christ, I can assure them they employ a most efficient mode of spreading the gospel for during the first few years of a mission at least by teaching the children to read & preaching in their own way in which there are imperfections, they do as much to remove prejudice & spread scriptural knowledge as can be effected by any European. I know no better way of commencing the work amongst these people than this. Its efficiency has been most abundantly testified both at Griqua Town & here & I may add too in the South Sea islands. I should most gladly incur all the fatigue & expense of taking them to their destinations, help them afterwards as much as in my faithful account of all that has been done - I don't know what more I could do but if anything more were needed I should not I hope be wanting in my attentions to his or her wishes These native teachers don't engage in the work without sacrifice £10 is by no means sufficient for the support of one in this country but they take it thankfully & some of them work most assiduously. Usually they have to spend some time in hunting &c. but at these times they employ another & pay him for his labour. During these hunting excursions they penetrate far into the country & we have lately ascertained they are not unmindful of their obligations even when far removed beyond the reach of their teachers & fellow Christians They sometimes collect the natives of villages together & tell them of the way of life & salvation by Jesus Christ

The country to the North abounds in game, the Lion, Elephant, Rhinoceros, Giraffe Zebra & many kinds of antelope But when we come within the Tropics the heat is excessive, particularly in the summer months at which period we visited it Water is scarce and it was only by following the tracks of the hunters to the different wells that we succeeded in accomplishing our journey. There is a tribe called the Bakalihari who live quite with the desert, they have scarcely any fountains, no cattle & subsist by snaring wild animals and eating roots, Providence in a peculiar way supplies the place of water to these sons of the desert. A species of bitter melon grows abundantly on many parts of the sandy plains which contains a considerable portion of sap. There they collect & making incisions into it bitter juice exudes into their vessels & by it they manage to quench their thirst, It is a poor substitute for But these hardy fellows prize their liberty so much nothing will induce them to quit what appears to us a miserable mode of existence., Probably they have, like the Laplanders with their sowthistle & smokers with their

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tobacco [become] so accustomed to their little melons they taste sweetly to them. They are much afraid of the other Bechuanas scarcely ever came to the waggons although our people ran after them and invited them to come & see the white people, they were afraid [0007] of being treated by us as they frequently are by their fellow Bechuanas who frequently seize them & reduce them to a kind of slavery

M^r Watt tells me the Glasgow churches are preparing clothing for the Bechuanas, these are good but unfortunately they always produce heart burnings amongst the people. We cant give to all & those who dont yet imagine we are partial & have favourites. It is of great importance for the missionary to appear as a universal friend. If I had clothes publicly committed to my trust, to be distributed publicly I should consider it a calamity, the only way to avoid the evil is to do all privately & never give without making them work some to make them feel they have earned what they have got. When things are given gratuitously it takes away all the feeling of independency and teaches them to become beggars without shame. Lately some boxes were sent and although all the [female] members of the church now appear in European gowns which look much neater than the skin gowns their own manufacture, yet it has caused a great deal of heart burning. Even the reigning chief a mean speaking double faced dirty fellow, without honesty to appear either on the side of the world or the Christians but conducts himself one way with the one party & another with the other, is grumbling sorely because says he "these skins take the poorest of the people & make them kings". Giving a man a sent of clothes in this country makes him a King! I may mention here one feature in the character of the Bechuanas, they generally have as much "blarney" as ever was possessed by every boy out of bork, my Father, my Lord, King, King of Kings, and even the [...] of the Deity were addressed to us in the Interior and even here it is not uncommon in requesting a favour to do with some of these pompous titles But give a point blank refusal & the significant titles dog, wolf, tiger , lion, are given with just as much grace as the former. It is amusing to hear them sometimes, you are niggardly, speedy, whovever marries you will get a wolf &c &c

I have seen M^r & M^{rs} W. Phillips & liked them particularly the latter very much, they are now somewhere in the Colony he is surveying some of the mission stations, marking out gardens for the people, learning the language &c He did not like the church at Cape Town & the church did not admire him The feeling in his mind is not to be wondered at, the Church has used the good old D^r most shamefully, abominably. Indeed when we reflect how much he has done for them, (??? taken by the hand & raised from indigence to ¶ affluence those very men who insult him at every church meeting) they ought to be reprobated by all the world. No doubt he has

had faults & who has not? but these must have been
heinous indeed to justify so much abuse thrown on a
genuine philanthropist. He has now risen beautifully
above it all & notwithstanding their conduct seeks still nothing
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but their good & edification. M^r Calderwood has accepted a call from them
greatly surprised at it are all who know him. We hope he has not got tired
of the heathen but sometimes they dont look so interesting in reality as they
do in anticipation

If you cant do anything in the way of ative agency, could you turn the
attention of some of the donors of clothes to the fact that a present of a
few spectacles for some old women who by great labour have
taught themselves to read but are now from want of sight losing
the benefit of their industry, would be peculiarly acceptable. Those
1/ a pair would do quite well. If you send any, please do
so care of D^r Phillip at the Cape via Rev T. Atkinson, Calesberg
I have mentioned this to M^r Taylor. O How much I should like to have
Inglis for my fellow labourer, i hope he will be sent hither

Please let me know the price of D^r Smith's work on Africa, you need
not consult M^r Moffat
on the subject of native agency. His views may
have altered, I hope they have But the many differences which have
sprung up between him & the Griqua Town men, I fear will still induce
him to look more coldly on this mode of operation than he otherwise
would. their bickerings have been most unfortunate & deeply are they
to be lamented for they are all excellent men But they still go on
the bretheren& here[are at variance & war] with those at G. & M^r M. with their letters & to
com-
mittee in London &c. I may be mistaken in my fears, I shall be
glad if I am. But when I came here the bretheren here possessed
the same feelings respecting the subject as M^r M. had when he left And it has only been by
long argument & bringing forward the facts of the case in sd gentle a way as i could that
thatI have succeeded in making them feel that our best mode is just to follow in the same tract
as that in which the
others havebeen so eminently blessed - they are now both wishing they had it in their power
to plant
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some of our native Christians in these newly visited tribes. It is really a great pity that this
spirit of rivalry
& opposition sprung up between the two Missions. Fear instead of rejoicing at the spread of
the gospel
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All the K miss^s looked upon themselves as aggrieved by the other extending so as to take most
of the people away from them.

It must be confessed that we have always been far inferior to the other mission. I cant [...] for
in any otther way than
laying it to the account of native agency. this however is strictly confidential & only for your
own information

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Please remember me to M^{rs} Sewell & Charles when you write. Let me know if she received my letters
& if you have done anything in respect to Rio. I am yours affectionately D Livingston

~~Care of Rev^d Dr Phillip, Church Square, Cape Town~~
M^r James Maclehose
83 Buchanan St.
Glasgow
N.B.