

Letter to Charles Livingstone, 16 March 1847

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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[0001]

Kuruman 16 March 1847

My Dear Brother

Your favour of 10 July /46 lately reached this station
Another to my better half bore it company and when we [^] [arrived] worried a few days ago
our hearts were gladdened by perusing them. We are right glad to hear from
you. Our pleasure however had a little alloy of pain. You mention
the failure of your health. And this although we know that you are
in better keeping than that of your best earthly friends. We had fondly
hoped that you should be allowed to devote your life to that work in
all which we hope to live & in which we desire to die. Good howev[-]
er is the will of the Lord - this is not our house. We look for a
better [^] [land] where no obstacle will ever arise in our service through infirmity
of body. Hope you will yet recover. Divine Providence will guide
your steps. May the Almighty God lift upon you the light of His
countenance & bless you. I have had no time for correspondence
during the last eight months I have travelled & builded much
but having come out to attend a meeting of committee I
have a little time to spare & will make the most of it for my
distant friends. Do not expect fine composition or fine
anything. I am becoming more & more a barbarian - can
read but little. And yet must keep up some acquaintance
with the medical & other sciences. Could not now deliver a speech
in English. My sentences are Sitchuanized by constantly expressing
my ideas in that language. Have lately been obliged to speak
Dutch of all languages the nastiest This is good only for oxen
You are aware I have left Mabotsa. It was my station. Edwards
got there through my influence But no sooner was he sure
of being finally away from Kuruman where he had been an
assistant missionary than every means were put into oper[-]
-ation to get the station to himself. He felt that he would be
nothing beside me. This spirit dictated the letter which was
published in the M.S. about the lion affair: I was not aware
of the spirit by which M^r & M^{rs} E were actuated and was only
anxious for the promotion of their honour & influence among
the natives. We have endured the scourge of tongues All manner
of accusations were made against me And the poor unhappy
couple believed that I [^] [too] had scandalized them. They thought I had
been actuated by the same spirit as themselves. They had an intense
desire to get quit of me and actually came all the way out to
Kuruman beseeching M^r Moffat to use all his influence with me to
induce me to leave Mabotsa. M^r M replied Why M^r L consulted us
all as to the propriety of his going to another tribe in order that the

gospel might have a wider range in the Interior. "O had I known that["] said Edwards ["I should not have acted as I have done" M^r M told him also to his utter amazement that no one had ever heard me say a word about him but of respect & kindness: Poor fellow Led astray by his own heart & desire to be great I sincerely pity him. Inglis took up his abode in my cause but was lately driven away by the Bakhatla & Edwards was obliged to bribe them by a large present to allow him to remain - they were loud [0002]

in their denuntiations - "You have driven away our true friend" &c. I mention this that you may be prepared for trials of a similar kind as those we have experienced - But few pass through life without feeling sorrow But few escape the scourge of the tongue. We ought to consecrate our whole being to the Divine glory - and do good whosoever does ill. Pray for us that we may be faithful unto death - follow the Saviour through good & evil report.

We are very happy in our work at Chonuane. The Chief Sechele is a sensible man - now reads pretty well - is fond of his testament and has an intense desire for everything connected with civilization We are poor & cannot help much. But when he has no soap he washes his clothes with pipe clay - We hope his people will follow his example. He & his wives are our best scholars & afford us much satisfaction None however are converted This is the great desideratum. Our thoughts always light on it. The locality we now inhabit is not good - our water is scanty & bad but we hope to remove to a better shortly This will make hard work for me but it is all in the course of the service of a good master. So we cannot grumble this subject brings a remark of yours to to my recollection You worked a day or two on Johns farm & got knocked up for sever[al] days after - Did you wonder at it - What a physiologist you are.! Suppose you had worked two hours [^] [each day] for the first week three for the second & four for the third & so on would you have been knocked up[?] Your system may not yet be all fitted for work but we cannot conclude that it never will be - you are not yet old When I thought of writing to the Directors - it was with the persuasion that you would be qualified both physically & mentally for missionary labour and a recommendation from any one in whom the Directors had confidence would have materially facilitated your acceptance - In China there is not much bodyly or other manual labour & so in India But here we have more manual exertion than mental[.] Commit thy way unto the Lord - Trust also in Him We have recently returned from a long tour through the region lying Eastward of Chonuane We visited very many tribes who have never seen a missionary before - the country is more populous than anywhere else in the Bechuana land. The near[er] we approach the coast the population becomes the more dense - more civilized too for they weave cotton & work in iron Tin, Copper & brass The men too carry on the operations of husbandry. A large river called the Ourie or Limpopo wends its way to the sea. It is more

than 400 yds accross. But all the fountains have been seized by Dutch emigrants commonly called Boors - and they treat the natives very badly. Many of the natives fled from our waggon when we were travelling as if they had beheld an enemy - Poor people they are destroyed for lack of knowledge they hate & kill each other so the Boors find them an easy prey. The Bechuanas are admitted by all the Boors to be an honest, quiet people yet they treat them as slaves - make them work without wages, and beat them shamefully - They lately attacked one tribe - killed a great number and took 400 captives - the booty amounted to 10,000 sheep and cattle beyond number - their Redeemer is mighty But [0003]

they know him not - your question respecting the complete annihilation of the idea of a supreme being in the Bechuana mind is rather difficult of solution - We come after missionaries have been in the country 30 years. Morimo or God or Chief is with every one's mouth. Intelligent natives say their forefathers spoke of God in the same way. A man escapes from an Elephant or lion - He instantly exclaims ["]How good God is to me! "What a heart God has to me!" A person is sick or dies - the exclamation then is "God has no heart["] vizvideliet [i.e.] He is not kind - they have parables from [...] we who are better informed can gather the idea of a future state The knowledge of some of these parables is universal and if we can believe testimony it was so of old - Here is one - God sent a Cameleon to say to men - ["]though you die you do not vanish (or become annihilated), you will return again" the Cameleon being a slow walker was outstripped by the little black lizard sent by another And the latter came first to man - the Black Lizard said to men ["]One will come after me & tell you that when you die you will not perish but will return again - It is all a message of lies When you die you perish as an ox["] - When the Cameleon came, men stopped his mouth by saying ["]O we know your message it is all lies -" There are cairns in the hills and when a traveller comes to one he throws a stone or branch of a tree to it and says with a loud voice ["]Hail O King - Let it be well with me in the way I now go - Let me find game - Let it be pleasant for me among the people I may meet["] - from these & other facts we who are more enlightened can gather fragments which seem to point to a primitive faith & worship. But none of the Bechuanas in distant parts can connect these fragments together so as to form one rational idea on the subject of the Godhead or futurity - They seem at one period to have worshipped animals. A little beetle is tied on the hair and something like a prayer is sometimes made to it If a Marolong (one of the tribes) kills a khoodoo he breaks out into a loud wail - ["]O I have killed my father. What shall I do yo yo yo yo["]. If asked why they do so - "It is our custom. We saw our forefathers do so & we do the same["]. They laugh at it - Have not the smallest devotional feel[-]ing unless spitting on the ground when they see the animal after which their tribe is named can be denominated such an emotion. Am glad you decide not to go to Kilmarnock It

would be a false step - Father does not understand the matter
I have examined the "new views" as they are called and find as you do
many excellent things in connection with them But still in relation
to the fundamental points I believe they are quite erroneous. I came to
that conclusion without any regard to "Authority" of names or systems
They are favoured with success in Scotland just because the
majority of the Scotch preaching has been outrageously wrong in
the opposite direction - I question whether success would attend
them where the "mercantile views" the "waiting systems" have not been
prominent in the preaching of ministers. Study thoroughly my
Dear brother If you become a missionary you will have little
time then. I wish I had a thorough education. If your constitution
is not ruined you would be better in connection with our
Society than school keeping because you would have both
summer and winter for study. If you can afford it Go to
some eminent physician & request his opinion on your health,
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also whether you may think of Missionary labour. Our Society has been trying
to get agents for China & after trial of several have come to the resolution of
educating sixteen expressly for that Mission. The funds are at present
depressed but will come round again. However you will know
best how to act. Let us hear from you soon & often. We answer all
who write us but find it beyond our tempers utmost stretch to
write those who maintain majestic silence. I thank you most
heartily for the books you sent. Am sorry I cannot possibly send you
any money. The reason - a most cogent one - is, I have none - We got
letter after letter from home breathing the most ardent aspirations
for emigration - We made a great effort & sent £20 to enable them to
emigrate Think of the acknowledgement It runs as follows - " John's
views of emigration exactly correspond or coincide with ours - He says
You may do something to a garden But old trees seldom bear trans-
planting well" This after boring me for years with their wishes to
emigrate - probably there has been a process of conviction but
of that I am ignorant - All I know is as the intense longings side
by side with " John's views of emigration exactly coinciding with
ours". I shall read D'Aubigne on our way homewards, and the
work of Mahan also - should have been delighted with his mental
philosophy. Admire Brown very much - a favourite work to
have to read on my travels

My wife will put in a line or two -

Yours affectionately

D Livingston

[My Dear Brother Charles
Many thanks for your kind letters
received about a fortnight ago. I feel sorry to hear your
health has failed, but I trust you will soon recover. We hear
you have grown very tall, we have hopes, when you [have] done

growing you will improve in health and become as strong
as my dear husband, he has very good health, which is a
great blessing in this country, he works very hard building,
gunmending and all kinds of work. We are now on a visit
to Kuruman where my parents reside, and hope to return
to our own home in about two months, hence I have
not time to say much more now, but hope sometime or other to
answer your kind letters. Accept the love of your affectionate sister
Mary L]

Care of Rev^d Dr Philip, Cape Town

For

M^r Charles Livingston

Almada St

Hamilton

Lanarkshire

N B