

Letter to David G. Watt, 18 August 1850

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

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Kolobeng 18th August 1850

My Dear Watt

Received your first note dated Northwich by Ches[^h][h]ire yesterday and with pleasure begin

an answer before the mental stimulus it imparted has evaporated. Happy to hear you are settled

in a sphere of usefulness. We hope you will prove a blessing and make yours a working church. I think if Christians are not set to act on the masses of heathenism around them they soon get to quarrelling and plague the "incumbent" who as the word I believe implies is a weight lying on them. I don't understand how the mental work of ministers is harder than that of missionaries. If one spins long yarns out of his own noddle instead of out of the infinite variety of motives inducements persuasions & threatenings &c drawn from Heaven earth & Hell & ready made for him in the Bible. I should think him in a pretty "fix" & fancy I see him sweating at every pore in close embrace of the Nile Difficulty

But I observed that one of the most useful ministers in London Mr Sherman had very little in his sermons of his own weaving and I believe you wish to be useful more than any thing else. Dr Leifchild seemed much the same as Mr Sherman Will you enlighten my darkness in reference to the mental labour which can be dispensed with here. I suspect young ministers often shoot over their peoples' heads by taking it for granted that they know the simple elementary truths of the gospel - I may as well give it to you for twitting me anent the Committee. I am no anti Phillipite. Nor am I an anti Committee-man. I think that a set of ignoramuses with but little principle in them would be best managed by a bishop or Archdeacon or something of that sort. If the body of missionaries had a little more knowledge or principle then they would be entitled to a committee or Presbytery. If they possessed the highest degree of principle & piety then they might be allowed to act as independants of the other words. Episcopacy for the most ignorant, Presbytery for the better informed & Independancy for the highest order of moral excellence, Despotism for the barbarian (Russia) mixed monarchy for the more civilized (Britain) & Democracy for the most civilized (United States) Committees don't work well here. It is my full & sorrowful conviction that there is no more Christian affection between the members of our Committee than there is between my riding ox and his grandmother. Had it been possible to foresee the state of feeling now existing I should never have formed the mission. Sechele made a very fair promise to become an eminent Christian. Mr Inglis who never saw him was visited by one of S's people and Mr I took the opportunity of spewing forth a volley of abuse upon Sechele, so very gross the man a heathen would not repeat his words to me. He repeatedly asked his authority for his statements but Inglis would not mention it. The man of course told his chief and I suspect the chief's declension commenced. We make but little headway in this country Even Ross who admits members more presbyterians cannot be said to be doing much. A triennial deputation

would perhaps be better than a committee for us for without joking we are a sorry set of

fellows. M^r Thomson late of Bellary is to be our Prelatus and agent. I just now notice that I am becoming latinized in style. If you get through thus far with your dictionary dont grumble for I will try & amend - M^r Freeman thinks I ought to have my extra expenses paid which I suppose is as good as done. He seems very friendly to us - and regarding all the friendship of the wise & good as tokens of the Divine goodness to me my obligations to the Father of lights are greatly increased. Sorry to hear of the attack on the old D^r M^r Whish was personal friend of mine though I never saw him. The old lady wished me to write her and was very fond of my letters to M^r Whish but she did not leave anything to me so we are as the boys say "quits" M^r Whish lately excited himself to get an iron plough for me and I believe it is on the way. But notwithstanding all that it would still take an immense deal to make me think ill of the good old D^r Wardlaw. The boys in the Academy seem to have attained to the status of the sweet singer of Israel, when he found himself wiser than all his teachers. Unmerciful expulsion ought to be the verdict unless the body of students is unanimous in the charges preferred. Esteem on the part of the student is essential to his success. The parcel from you of which I have been advised has not yet reached us. I shall inform you when it does. I see your relatives as I suppose they are in Irvine dont practise the filthy bawbee system

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Well I expect you hope for some more information about the Lake. We have revisited it. My wife & children, Sechele & a party of 20 Bakwains & our native teacher Mebaloe formed the cavalcade. Went to Sekhomi's. After salutations I said I passed you last year because I knew you did not wish me to get into the Lake. He replied u'nstile mi kia boka You surpassed me, & I thank you. (or give in) We had more intercourse with the Bakalaboka than last year and having gone in shortly after the rains fell and plenty of water. When we reached the Zouga it was just beginning to flow and fever prevailed. We crossed and went upon the North bank intending to go to Sebitoane but when near the junction of the Tamunakll & Zouga got intelligence of the existence of the fly styled "Tsetse" M^{rs} L thought

she would like to stand down at this Botaiawa town while I went North on oxback. When we reached that point we found fever raging. Two Englishmen had come up for ivory - a third one & a Hottentot died of it. The whole party were put to a standstill by the fever. I coaxed up one of the Englishmen from the gates of the grave and he repaid my kindness by cheating me! We only remained a week with the Botaiawa. One of the days was put in taking down my wife to take a peep at the Lake. The children took to playing in it as ducklings do. "Paddling" in it was grand fun, Immediately on our return a driver & leader were knocked down by the fever. Then two of the children and then other three of the party - this made me give up the idea of going any farther. We spent two pleasant Sundays with the Botaiawa. But I was obliged to become driver in order to get away on Monday. The Lake is the great focus of fever. And when fairly away our party were in mercy restored to health. The Botaiawa chief was more friendly this year than last - the friendship began in the African manner by his taking an intense longing for a beautiful gun presented to me by Lieut^t Arkwright. He promised me guides to take me to Sebituane although he refused them to a trader who offered him any reward he chose to ask - said he would supply M^{rs} L with elephants' flesh &c during my absence and added if I knew his character & friendship I should have no hesitation in trusting him anent my family & gun. I immediately handed it to him. Had we been permitted to go to Sebitoane's the act of confidence would have been more than repaid. It is of great importance to gain the confidence of these fellows in the beginning. I was mistaken in supposing that Pneumonia is the only complaint prevalent there. We found real Paludal fever

And it descends every year the natives say from the North with or previous to the annual flow of waters. Providence seems determined to keep Intertropical Africa for the black races. No European could live on the Ngami. A more salubrious climate must exist farther up to the North. And that the country is higher seems evident from the fact mentioned by the Bahkoba that the water of the Teoge the river which falls into the Ngami at the North West part of it flows with great rapidity. Canoes ascending punt all the way and the men must hold on by the reed in order to prevent being carried back by the current. Large trees springbucks & other antelopes are sometimes brought down by it. Do you wonder at my pressing on in the way we have done. The Bechuana mission has been carried on in a cul de sac. I tried to break through by going among the Eastern tribes but the Boers shut up the field A French missionary - M^r Fridoux of Motito later tried to follow on my trail to the Bamangwato but was turned back by a party of armed men. When he burst through the Barrier on the North. It appeared very plain that no mission could be successful there unless we could go [^] [to] a well-watered country having a passage to the sea on either the East or West coast. This project I am almost afraid to moot but nothing less will do. I intend [...] to go in next year and remain a twelve-month. My wife poor soul I pity her, proposed to let me go for that time while she remains at Kolobeng - You will pray for us both during that period. Referring to the above I cannot but smile when I think of one gentleman (Inglis) going about the country for years pretending he could not get a sphere of labour although he never made a Latitude of Kolobeng

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I have heard him hinting that M^r Moffat had told stories when he said that there were any people at all in the country. What M^r M asserted was that no one knew the termination of Bechuana country. I felt disappointed to find so small a population to the South of this but go far enough and you will see plenty of people. I should say ~~from~~ [on] good grounds that the Sitchuana will carry a man a thousand miles beyond this and how much farther nobody knows. It is however upon the whole a thinly peopled country. The only prolific people in it are the missionaries. We have four children already. Did you see certain resolutions passed at a meeting at Leeds. With all due deference to the superior knowledge & judgement of the Leeds worthies I suspect they did not very well know what to do with themselves. They talk of a "lapse of 50 years" as requiring a little friendly enquiry, in innocent unconscious-ness that 2 years have not elapsed since there was as much of both hostile and friendly enquiry as would have satisfied most reasonable men. And then they exalt their "most valued secretary Rev J.G. Miall" to the skies, for what, letting groundless suspicions become known, and penning resolutions which devour each other like Pharoah's lean kine. This (Aside) we suspect these fellows dont allow the mission churches so much liberty as they ought to have) But [1st] Directors, Remember we must have the mission churches independant self supported - self governed. We wont allow you to lord it over them. Then 2^{dly} Directors - why do you allow these free independant churches to so use their liberty in reference to Gov^t grants for education? Coerce them instantler. They know that independant self supported self governed churches at home can do as they like on the same subject. Out & out voluntary as I am I dont like to see the Directors pushed up into a corner & forced by these Leeds bullies to proclaim freedom & coercion with the same breath

and then to crown all they part stroking each others backs and puffing about the "excellent spirit which characterized this meeting". Excellent spirit forsooth. M^r Tidman displayed an excellent spirit in submitting to be poked by the hour without telling them what they dont seem to know that the agents of the L.M.S. both at home & abroad are the worst paid of all the Societie's agents in existence: If it had been a liberal spirit they would have proposed that M^r Tidman be requested to accept the £500. As it is now he gives £100 annually to the society. Or they would have passed a resolution that as all their suspicions were groundless they double their subscriptions for the future. Why dont you give them a few hints - sitting on your watch tower I think you might enjoy poking those who go too far even in the right direction. There are fools among the new lights no doubt as you have among the old lights who will say anything. And sometimes a rough sentence will come out of the mouth of a wise man - but you would not condemn a whole party on that account I know. That which makes me think favourably of them is the practice If obliged to vote I should decide for those who are right in practice although they might be as I believe the new lights are about half a hairsbreadth wrong in theology. I think it was an immense absurdity to throw them off. You Scotch independants have somewhat of the Yankee in you. Independants recom-municating independants. Bah. Hoot man. D^r Alexander seems the only liberal fellow among you. I am looking for your parcel but it does not turn out Have heard nothing as yet from any source except from you about what the Editor of the Patriot wrote. It may turn out soon. Think I must go down to the colony to get my uvula excised. If I do I shall write you thence. Hope you will get through this at two sittings. No large paper. I suppose in your quarter of the world. I give you a sheet like a newspaper and you return a lady's note. Is that the fashion in Cheshire. What did you eat which cost £10 per month - bank notes? I am still in darkness - Have written Moore & Fairbrother. The latter in answer to request but he seems to have got entangl

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in the meshes of courtship & forgotten to answer me. Dont send envelopes here - I shall attend to your suggestions respecting the paper & probably will send it to you in the way you propose. But I intend to be away Lakeward for a Twelvemonth next season. Have given the Directors some particulars respecting the Lake omitted last year.

With affectionate salutations

I conclude this long epistle. The opportunity is one formed by an express from the Government to M^r Oswell whom we met on our return Dont expect he will go very far beyond our point by himself - But we shall see

D Livingstone

Care of Rev^d W. Thompson Cape Town

Rev^d D. G. Watt.
Northwich
Cheshire