

## Letter to Roderick I. Murchison, 4 March 1856

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N<sup>o</sup> III

Tette or Nyungwe

River Zambesi, Africa

4<sup>th</sup> March 1856

~~To Sir Roderick I. Murchison.~~

Sir,-

~~The~~ enclosures No I. and No II. could not be entirely copied after my arrival on the 2d inst but ~~H[H]~~aving for the delay of the messenger half a day more[,] I shall spend the ~~in copying~~ No III the whole if legible being intended to form but one communication. ~~The~~ concluding [on this] portion [^][of my communication] referring principally to the people[~~of this part of~~ Africa].

Perhaps no-where else do hills seem exert a more powerful and well marked on national character, than do in Africa. Every one is aware the brave resistance offered by the mountaineers to the British soldiers, whom I believe there are none more beneath the sun. And the whole the hill tribes with but few exceptions a similarity of character. they chiefly along the Eastern side of [...] those among[^][whom] I have lately

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~~been~~ travelling[ed][,] have been fighting with the for the last two years[,] and [^][have] actually the good men of Tette shut up in fort during most of that time. They a strong muscular race, and from work in their gardens[,] the men hands like those of English ploughmen. hill people in general[,] they are attached to the soil. ~~Tt~~[T]heir laws are stringent. ~~Tt~~[T]he boundaries of the of each are well defined and an elephant be killed, the huntsman wait till one comes from the of the land, to give permission to it up. ~~Tt~~[T]he underlying tusk and of the carcase, are likewise the of him on whose soil ~~it~~^[^][the elephant] fell.

~~Tt~~[T]hey may well love their land, for it abundance of grain, and here, superior and rice may be seen flourishing by side. ~~Tt~~[T]heir government is sort of mongrel republican-feudalism[,] has decided that no child of a can succeed his father. ~~A system of separating the young men from their parents and relatives, would have pleased the author of the Cyropaedia; yet the frequent application of the ordeal to get rid of a wife no longer loved, shews that Xenophon's beau ideal does not produce gallantry equal to that which flows from the birch of ofnotext wrathful village pedagogue among ourselves.~~ the country towards Mozambique people of similar warlike propensities, if it is[these are] owing to an infusion of Arab in their veins, that mixture does not to have had much influence in their ; for those are more negro than else. they all possess a very vivid of the agency of unseen spirits human affairs-[,] ~~Tt~~this[which] I believe is especially of the true negro family.

Situated more towards the centre of continent, we have the Bechuana who live generally on plains. with the Caffre family[,] they are effeminate and cowardly; yet even we see courage manifested by those inhabit a hill country. Witness [for example,] Sebituane[,] who fought his way from the country to the Barotsé[;[,] and to the . Moshesh shewed the spirit lately in ~~an~~[his] encounter English troops. ~~Tt~~[T]hese stand highest the scale, and certain poor Bechuanas Bakalahari, are the lowest.

~~Tt~~[T]he latter live on the Desert, and some their little villages extend down the

Limpopo. They generally attach themselves influential men in the Bechuana

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[towns,] who furnish them with dogs, spears, and , and in return receive the skins of animals as they may kill either the dogs or by means of pitfalls.

They are all fond of agriculture, and possess a few goats even. But generally hard fare [which] they endure, makes [^][the] most miserable objects to be met in Africa. From the descriptions given in books I imagine their thin legs and arms, large abdomens, and the lustreless eyes of their children, make them <sup>^</sup>Bakalahari the counterparts of South Australians. n.p. Considerable confusion has been introduced in consequence of the all such being indiscriminately use of the termed "Caffres". It is an instance in which the use of a single word involves a very free use of the travellers licence, for does it not appear to you most terrifically bold for us to presume to pretend to speak of hunting to traveling and sometimes talking big among thousands of "Caffres", - those "magnificent savages" > United Services Gazette to wage war with whom Sir Harry Smith declared was like fighting with Circassians or Algerine Arabs. I never can repress a smile when I hear Boers or Englishmen & Sheetspeak of the more abject of the Bechuanas as "Caffres". Seeing that the real Caffres or Zulah race are those who have bawled about the English soldier so unceremoniously, and one as remarkable as New Zealanders for suffering no nonsense from either white or brown. This difference in national character explains at a glance why the tide of emigration spreads away from Caffreland towards the more central parts, - in the sovereignty and Cashan mountains. And Oddly enough, among the very first articles of the political existence Governments of a Republic on the plains, is a law made for the punishment of cowardice! They of course know their own wants best.

But though it is all very well, speaking in a loose way, to ascribe developement of national character the physical features of the country, suspect that those who are accustomed curb the imagination in the severe [^][employed to] of testing for truth [^][employed] in the physical , would attribute more to or breed than to mere scenery. at the Bushmen - living on the plains, - Eating the same food, but

[0006] in scantier measure, - and subjected all [^][and the] [the Same] climatorial and physical influences the Bakalahari, yet how enormously the results. They the Bushman a wiry compact frame, is brave, independant, scorns to till the ground keep domestic animals. the Bakalahari spiritless and abject in demeanour thought, delights in cultivating a corn, or pumpkins or [in] rearing few goats. And both [^][races] have been at the same scenes for centuries. or three Bechuanas from the towns, the villages of the Bakalahari, pillage them of all their skins [^][of animals] without . If by chance they [^][Blakhalari] stumble a hamlet of Bushmen, they speak and readily deliver up any tobacco may have, as a peace offering, and dread of the poisoned arrow which decide whether they spoke truly saying they had none.

Again look at the River Zouga through a part of the Bushman Bakalahari desert. the Bayeiye Bakoba live on its reedy islets, gardens, rear goats, fish and alternately and are generally

[0007] of considerable muscular development. you meet them they are always the . And they are the Quakers of the body in Africa. They never fought any one, but invariably submitted whoever conquered the lands adjacent their rivers. They say, their progenitors bows of the castor oil plant, they broke; "They herefore" (!) they resolved to fight any more." They never much property, for every one turns into their villages to eat what he find. I have been in their canoes found the pots boiling briskly untill came near to the villages. Having , we then entered with the pots empty, looking quite innocently on any who happened to drop in to . Contrast these Friends with Lords of the isles, [^][ Sekote & &][and others,] living on [among] identical , and ornamenting their with human ~~erania~~ skulls. [N.P] They of the differences observed in inhabiting the same localities, though spoils the poetry of the thing, consists certain spots

being the choice of the or family;[.]s[S]o when we see certain assembled on particular spots, may be more precise to say we see the

[0008] disposition manifested in the , rather than that the part chosen a subsequent disposition. Tt[T]his be evident, when I say that in the of the Bakalahari and Bushmen, have instances of compulsion and . the Bakalahari were the [^][first] body Bechuana emigrants who came the country, and[They] possessed large of very long horned cattle, the of which are now at Ngami. second migration of Bechuana them of their cattle and drove into the Desert. they still cleave tenaciously to the tastes of their . While for the Bushman, the is his choice, and ever has been near the Coanza to the Cape. When see a choice fallen on mountains, means only [^][that] the race meant to defend , t[T]heir progenitors recognized the , [which-is]acknowledged universally, except Caffre police or Hottentots rebel, viz.- no[ne]one deserves liberty except those are willing to fight for it. Tt[T]his gathers strength from locality; developes it more and more; still I think the principle was first, , and alone vital.

In reference to the origin of all these , I feel fully convinced from the

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3<sup>d</sup> Sheet very great similarity in all their dialects, they are essentially one race of men. Tt[T]he or we may say the skeletons of [^][dialects of] Caffre;- Bechuana;- Bayeiye;- Barotse;- ;- Batonga or people of the Zambesi;- ;- Babisa;- the Negroes of Londa, and people on the west coast;- all wonderfully alike. A great proportion the roots is identical in all.[N.P>]Tt[T]he Bushman seems an exception, but this from little I can collect of it is more apparent real. While all the others are developed one and nearly the same direction this into a series of remarkable clicks. Tt[T]he syllable on which in other dialects the emphasis is put, in this constitutes whole word. But though the variations in clicks, the development is greater in other dialects. TtThey have for instance the singular, plural and dual numbers; the masculine,femineinefeminine and neuter genders; and the aorist ^tense which the others have not.N.P> It may be gratifying for you to hear that the Bible is nearly all translated into Sichuana - the dialect of the Bechuana and the most regularly developed of all negro languages. Of its capabilities you may judge, when I mention that the Pentateuch is fully expressed in a considerable number fewer words than in the Greek Septuagint, and in a very large number less than in our verbose English. Of its copiousness, I can not well speak, for I have been learning it for fifteen years, and others have been doing so for double that time, and we hear new words every day or two. It is fortunate so many are now secured, and others not in the language or in any language till ^the ideas are taken from the sacred oracles are adopted into the language. For, people born in the country, though they speak it without foreign accent, and even natives in contact with Europeans, are remarkable for the scantiness of their vocabularies.

In the animal kingdom, there are antelopes which I believe have been unknown; that all [^][of which] abound the great valley, but no where else. is specially adapted for treading on and marshy spots, by great from point of toe to {name forgotten of[the] little hoofs above [^][the ] fetlock.) It has a heavy , looks paunchy and hides itself but the nose [in water]. I wished to it after my friend Captain Vardon

a[my] warm friend and a participator in discovery Africa; but I could not bring any unless-I had[for want of] tin boxes. Tropical go through everything [^][else]. Will the Society gratify me in this?

[0011] will send it when I can. Its native name Nakong or Setutunka. [N.P>] Another little abounds in great numbers near Sesheke. cry of alarm is like that of the domestic . It is called Thianyané - t[T]he third named Poku and it abounds in numbers above the Barotse is exactly like the Lechusee which was when we went first [^][to] Lake , but considerably smaller in way and of a redder colour. It to be an instance of the [^][application of the] law has

determined larger development animals in the more temperate & parts of the continent, than in hot, equatorial regions, where food in lavish profusion. this different from M<sup>rs</sup> Bachmans theory, I have no doubt as to the existence the law. A full grown elephant here instance, measures quite two feet , than a similar animal does on Limpopo or at Kolobeng; ~~this~~ the smaller animal carries the ivory.[N.P>] I never before saw ~~such~~ [so] numbers[ous] or [so]~~such~~ tame elephants, as at confluence of [the] Kafue[<sup>^</sup>][& Zambesi]. Buffaloes, zebras and hippopotami, were equally so, it seemed as if we had got back to time, when megatheriae roamed about by man. We had to shout to

[0012] to get out of the way, and then their second were - "its a trick",- "we're surrounded" - back they came tearing through our line. and hyaenas are so numerous [that] all the in the gardens are built on trees, and people never go half a mile into the woods . One of our best men ran off we believe a fit of insanity during the night, and never found a trace of him.

I ~~believe~~ [W]e have no reason to of the treatment we have met on ~~this river~~ [the Zambesi]. the inhabitants have plenty great[ain] and were never stingy with it. it been otherwise we should have starved. spared to return, I will pay them again, not ~~the Lord Chancellor~~ [of the Exchequer][,] as those do,

I ~~suppose~~, who publish in their books, they gave "three buttons" or a "cotton " in return for handsome presents food. they believed our statements everything being expended, untill close to

Tette; and as they levy tribute [thus] on traders found great difficulty in getting along.

~~Are they worse thus, only where they know us christians best. We do not seem to convey a favourable idea of our blessed Christianity to the Heathen. Do we? N.P> With respect to the perpetuity of the African race, we have a stronger hope than in the case of the South Sea Islanders and other savage nations in contact with 4th Europeans. Tthe well known preference that fever manifests for the natives of Northern Europe, and the indisposition it exhibits to make victims of Africans, would lead one were they persons resident in one region of this continent to say <sup>^</sup>that the white race was that doomed to extinction. However to be accounted forexpained; the Africans who have come under my observation, are not subject to many of the diseases which thin our own numbers. Small pox and measles paid a passing visit through the continent some twenty years ago, and through they committed great ravages, they did not remain endemic nor return. Tthey did not find a congenial soil, and though the period preceeding the rains is eminently epidemic in its constitution, excepting hooping cough, no epidemic known in Europe appears. TtThat there is an indisposition independantindependent of climatorialie influences, isbecomes I imagine, evident, when the venereal diseaseis is seenobserved to die out spontaneously in Africans of pure blood; and those of mixed blood are subjected to all its forms; in<sup>^</sup>with a virulence exactly proportioned to the amount of European blood in their veins. NP> Tending in the same way as this indisposition to diseases which decimate tribes which will soonare passing away, <sup>^</sup>is the fact that the Africans are wonderfully prolific. TtThe Bushmen are equally so, but the Bechuanas are an exception which the introduction of Christianity may remove. As this has not, it is reported, happened in the Pacific, the data on which our hopes are founded may prove deceptive.~~

My present party amounts to one hundred ten or twelve and I have taken ivory to purchase a long list of articles Sekeletu. Less I could scarcely do

[less] in return for all his kindness to me[,] it will be initiating his people into at the same time. I expect to employment for the men when the sea, in order that they may themselves and save a little their return during my absence in . Tt[T]he prospect of coming down trade in canoes is to them so feasible

[that] all are delighted with it. I have not seen rapid which would delay the Makololo day. Had I not been obliged to part the price of the canoe, ~~otherwise~~ should have examined all minutely. present, I am indulging the belief that have water carriage all the way to the of the Eastern

ridge; and should Makololo come nearer, we shall not quite so much out of the world as we have been

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[N.P.] It may be proper to refer to what has been in former times, in the way of crossing continent, though my enquiries lead the belief that the honour belongs to our . The Portuguese invariably applaud little ebullition of patriotic feeling they in me; and I can not but participate their feelings, when, in the history of , proud mention is made of brave attempt of Captain José da , [in 1678] to penetrate from Benguella the Rio da Senna (Zambesi). He was to retire after exploring a large tract new country. In 1800, the project was revived by the energetic D<sup>r</sup> Lacerda,

[who] recommending[ed] the erection of a chain forts along the banks of the Coanza to effect a line of communication the East and West coasts. T<sup>t</sup>[T]his a mistaken idea of the source of Coanza, as it arises near Bihé[,] of the Western ridge. But a having been made few years afterwards by some native with the Mohias (Balonda), the of Angola was gratified 1815 by the arrival of two ~~sueh~~[persons]

(feirantes prietos) named Pedro Jaoã and Antoneo José with

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"proving thereby", as stated in the Government of the day, "the possibility of a communication." Certain Arabs a few years before my visit to Loanda from the opposite coast to Benguella; with a view to improve the event the of Angola offered one million Reis (about £142) and an honorary in the Portuguese army, to one who would accompany them , but no one went. The journey now be performed by Ben Habib,

Pereira and others visited Cazembe, and

Senhor Graça[<sup>^</sup>][visited] Matiamvo. If I knew any one else had done more I certainly mention it. [\* See M<sup>r</sup> Macqueens Paper Journal vol XXVI] I cannot a trace of a road from Laconda .

I feel most thankful to God who has my life while so many who have done more good have been off. But I am not so much elated might have been expected, for the end the geographical feat is but the beginning the missionary enterprise. Geographers to make men better acquainted with other[,] - soldiers fighting against oppression;

- and sailors rescuing captives in deadly climes;- all as well as missionaries ~~are all~~ aiding hastening on a glorious consummation all God's dealings to man, in the hope that I may yet be permitted to do some good to this poor long trodden down , the gentlemen over whom you have the honour to preside will I doubt not cordially join. David Livingston