

Letter to Roderick I. Murchison, 4 March 1856

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[0001]

N^o III

Tette or Nyungwe

River Zambesi, Africa

4th March 1856

~~[To] Sir Roderick I. Murchison.~~

Sir,-

~~the enclosures N^o I.~~

~~and N^o II. could not be entirely copied~~

~~after my arrival on the 2^d inst but~~ [H[H]]aving

arranged for the delay of the messenger

for half a day more[,] I shall spend the

time in copying N^o 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
to exert a more powerful and well marked
influence on national character, than
they do in Africa. Every one is aware
of the brave resistance offered by the
Caffre mountaineers to the British soldiers,
than whom I believe there are none more
brave beneath the sun. And the whole
of the hill tribes with but few exceptions
possess a similarity of character. they
extend chiefly along the Eastern side of
the [...] those among [^] [whom] I have lately

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~~been travelling~~ [ed][,] have been fighting with the

Portuguese for the last two years[,] and [^] [have] actually

kept the good men of Tette shut up in
their fort during most of that time. They

are a strong muscular race, and from
constant work in their gardens[,] the men
have hands like those of English ploughmen.

Like hill people in general[,] they are
much attached to the soil. ‡[T]heir laws are
very stringent. ‡[T]he boundaries of the
lands of each are well defined and

should an elephant be killed, the huntsman
must wait till one comes from the
lord of the land, to give permission to

cut it up. ‡[T]he underlying tusk and half of the carcass, are likewise the property of him on whose soil it [^] [the elephant] fell. ‡[T]hey may well love their land, for it yields abundance of grain, and here, superior wheat and rice may be seen flourishing side by side. ‡[T]heir government is a sort of mongrel republican-feudalism[,] which has decided that no child of a chief 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—

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~~equal to that which flows from the birch of~~
~~of wrathful village pedagogue among~~
~~ourselves the country towards Mozambique~~
 supports people of similar warlike propensities,
 and if it is [these are] owing to an infusion of Arab
 blood in their veins, that mixture does not
 seem to have had much influence in their
 customs; for those are more negro than
 aught else. they all possess a very vivid
 impression of the agency of unseen spirits
 in human affairs-[,]this [which] I believe is especially
 characteristic of the true negro family.

Situated more towards the centre of the continent, we have the Bechuana tribes who live generally on plains. Compared with the Caffre family[,] they are all effeminate and cowardly; yet even here we see courage manifested by those who inhabit a hill country. Witness [for example,] Sebituane[,] who fought his way from the Basuta country to the Barotsé[;[,] and to the Bashukulompo. Moshesh shewed the same spirit lately in an [his] encounter with English troops. ‡[T]hese stand highest in the scale, and certain poor Bechuanas named Bakalahari, are the lowest. ‡[T]he latter live on the Desert, and some of their little villages extend down the Limpopo. ‡[T]hey generally attach themselves to influential men in the Bechuana

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 [towns[,] who furnish them with dogs, spears, and

tobacco, and in return receive the skins of such animals as they may kill either with the dogs or by means of pitfalls. t[T]hey are all fond of agriculture, and some possess a few goats even. But the generally hard fare [which] they endure[,] makes them [^] [the] most miserable objects to be met with 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 [^] [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 [presumptuous to pretend] [to speak of] hunt[ing] to travel[ing] and sometimes talk[ing] 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~~

[0005]

~~2^d Sheet~~

~~speak of the more abject of the Bechuanas as "Caffres". Seeing t[T]he real Caffres or Zulah race are those who have banded 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 o[O]ddly 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! t[T]hey of course know their own wants best.~~

But though it is all very well, in speaking in a loose way, to ascribe the development of national character to the physical features of the country,

I suspect that those who are accustomed
to curb the imagination in the severe
way [^] [employed to] of testing for truth [^] [employed] in the physical
sciences, would attribute more to
race or breed than to mere scenery.
Look at the Bushmen - living on the
same plains, - Eating the same food, but

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

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

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possessed of considerable muscular development.
Wherever you meet them they are always the
same. ~~And~~ ‡[T]hey are the Quakers of the body
politic in Africa. ‡[T]hey never fought
with any one, but invariably submitted
to whoever conquered the lands adjacent
to their rivers. ‡[T]hey say, their progenitors
made bows of the castor oil plant,
and they broke; "‡[T]herefore"(!) they resolved
never to fight any more." ‡[T]hey never
acquire much property, for every one turns
aside into their villages to eat what he

can find. I have been in their canoes
and found the pots boiling briskly untill
we came near to the villages. Having
dined, we then entered with the pots empty,
and looking quite innocently on any
strangers who happened to drop in to
dinner. Contrast these Friends with
the Lords of the isles, [^] [Sekote&& [and others,] living ~~on~~[among] identical
circumstances, and ornamenting their
dwellings with human ~~crania~~ [skulls]. [N.P]†[T]he
cause of the differences observed in
tribes inhabiting the same localities, though
it spoils the poetry of the thing, consists
in certain spots being the choice of the
race or family;[.]s[S]o when we see certain
characters assembled on particular spots,
it may be more precise to say we see the

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

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

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3^d Sheet

very great similarity in all their dialects,
that they are essentially one race of men. t̥[T]he
structure or we may say the skeletons of
the [ʘ] [dialects of] Caffre;- Bechuana;- Bayeiye;- Barotse;-
Batoka;- Batonga or people of the Zambesi;-
Mashona;- Babisa;- the Negroes of Londa,
Angola and people on the west coast;-
are all wonderfully alike. A great proportion
of the roots is identical in all. [N.P]t̥[T]he Bushman
tongue seems an exception, but this from
the little I can collect of it is more apparent
than real. While all the others are developed
in one and nearly the same direction this
deviates into a series of remarkable clicks.
t̥[T]he syllable on which in other dialects the
chief emphasis is put, in this constitutes
the whole word. But though the variations
lie in clicks, the development is greater
than in other dialects. t̥[T]hey have for
instance the singular, plural and dual
numbers; the masculine[,femine[ine] and
neuter genders; and the aorist [ʘ] [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[y]numbe fewer words—

[0010]

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 [ʘ] [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
three antelopes which I believe have been

hitherto unknown; ~~that~~ all [^] [of which] abound
 in the great valley, but no where else.
 One is specially adapted for treading on
 mud and marshy spots, by great
 length from point of toe to ~~(name forgotten~~
~~of~~ [the] little hoofs above [^] [the] fetlock.) It has a heavy
 gait, looks paunchy and hides itself
 all but the nose [in water]. I wished to
 name it after ~~my friend~~ Captain Vardon
 a[my] warm friend and a participator in discovery
 in Africa; but I could not bring any
 skin ~~unless I had~~ [for want of] tin boxes. Tropical
 rains go through everything [^] [else]. Will the
 Zoological Society gratify me in this?

[0011]

I will send it when I can. Its native name
 is Nakong or Setutunka. [N.P] Another little
 antelope abounds in great numbers near Sesheke.
 Its cry of alarm is like that of the domestic
 fowl. It is called Thianyané - ~~t~~[T]he third
 is named Poku and it abounds in
 prodigious numbers above the Barotse
 It is exactly like the Lechusee which was
 discovered when we went first [^] [to] Lake
 Ngami, but considerably smaller in
 every way and of a redder colour. It
 seems to be an instance of the [^] [application of the] law
 which has determined larger development
 for animals in the more temperate &
 colder parts of the continent, than in
 the hot, equatorial regions, where food
 abounds in lavish profusion. this
 is different from M^{rs} Bachmans theory,
 but I have no doubt as to the existence
 of the law. A full grown elephant here
 for instance, measures quite two feet
 less, than a similar animal does on
 the Limpopo or at Kolobeng; ~~this~~
 though the smaller animal carries the
 largest ivory. [N.P] I never before saw ~~such~~
 [so] numbers[ous] or [so]~~such~~ tame elephants, as at
 the confluence of [the] Kafue [^] [& Zambesi]. Buffaloes, zebras
 pigs and hippopotami, were equally so,
 and it seemed as if we had got back to
 the time, when megatheriae roamed about
 undisturbed by man. We had to shout to

[0012]

them to get out of the way, and then their second
 thoughts were - "its a trick",- "we're surrounded" -

and back they came tearing through our line.
Lions and hyaenas are so numerous [that] all the
huts in the gardens are built on trees, and
the people never go half a mile into the woods
alone. One of our best men ran off we believe
in a fit of insanity during the night, and
we never found a trace of him.

~~I believe~~[W]e have no reason to
complain of the treatment we have met on
~~this river~~ [the Zambesi]. the inhabitants have plenty
of great [ain] and were never stingy with it.
Had it been otherwise we should have starved.
If spared to return, I will pay them again,
and not the Lord Chancellor [of the Exchequer][.] as those do,
~~I suppose~~, who publish in their books,
that they gave "three buttons" or a "cotton
handkerchief" in return for handsome presents
or food. they believed our statements
of everything being expended, untill close to
Tette; and as they levy tribute [thus] on traders
we 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-

[0013]

~~4th~~

Europeans. the 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 [^] [that] the white race
was that doomed to extinction. However
to be accounted for [explained], 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. they did not find a congenial
soil, and though the period preceding the
rains is eminently epidemic in its
constitution, excepting hooping cough,

no epidemic known in Europe appears:
t[T]hat there is an indisposition independant
of climatorial [ic] influences, is [becomes] I imagine,
evident, when the venereal disease is
is seen [observed] to die out spontaneously in
Africans of pure blood; and those of
mixed blood are subjected to all its forms,
in [^] [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

[0014]

tribes which will soon [are] pass[ing] away, [^] [is the fact that] the
Africans are wonderfully prolific. t[T]he
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
and ten or twelve and I have taken ivory
enough to purchase a long list of articles
for Sekeletu. Less I could scarcely do
[less] in return for all his kindness to me[,]
and it will be initiating his people into
trade at the same time. I expect to
find employment for the men when
nearer the sea, in order that they may
support themselves and save a little
for their return during my absence in
England. t[T]he prospect of coming down
to trade in canoes is to them so feasible
[that] all are delighted with it. I have not seen
a rapid which would delay the Makololo
a day. Had I not been obliged to part
with the price of the canoe, otherwise
I should have examined all minutely.
At present, I am indulging the belief that
we have water carriage all the way to the
foot of the Eastern ridge; and should
the Makololo come nearer, we shall not
be quite so much out of the world as we have been

[0015]

[N.P.] It may be proper to refer to what has been
done in former times, in the way of crossing
the continent, though my enquiries lead
to the belief that the honour belongs to our
country. The Portuguese invariably applaud

any little ebullition of patriotic feeling they observe in me; and I can not but participate in their feelings, when, in the history of Angola, proud mention is made of the brave attempt of Captain José da Roza, [in 1678] to penetrate from Benguella to the Rio da Senna (Zambesi). He was forced to retire after exploring a large tract of new country. In 1800, the project was again revived by the energetic D^r Lacerda, [who] recommending[ed] the erection of a chain of forts along the banks of the Coanza whereby to effect a line of communication between the East and West coasts. ‡[T]his shewed a mistaken idea of the source of the Coanza, as it arises near Bihé[,] West of the Western ridge. But a communication having been made a few years afterwards by some native traders with the Mohias (Balonda), the Government of Angola was gratified in 1815 by the arrival of two ~~sueh~~ [persons] (feirantes prietos) named Pedro Jaoã Baptista and Antoneo José with

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 letters from the Governor of Mosambique "proving thereby", as stated in the Government document of the day, "the possibility of such a communication." Certain Arabs too a few years before my visit to Loanda came from the opposite coast to Benguella; and with a view to improve the event the Government of Angola offered one million of Reis (about £142) and an honorary captaincy in the Portuguese army, to any one who would accompany them back, but no one went. The journey will now be performed by Ben Habib, Pereira and others visited Cazembe, and Senhor Graça [^] [visited] Matiamvo. If I knew that any one else had done more I would certainly mention it. [* See M^r Macqueens Paper RGS Journal vol XXVI] I cannot find a trace of a road from Laconda either.

I feel most thankful to God who has prolonged my life while so many who would have done more good have been cut off. But I am not so much elated as might have been expected, for the end

of the geographical feat is but the beginning
of the missionary enterprise. Geographers
labouring to make men better acquainted with
each other[,] - soldiers fighting against oppression;
- and sailors rescuing captives in deadly climes;-
are all as well as missionaries ~~are all~~ aiding
in hastening on a glorious consummation
of all God's dealings to man, in the hope that

that I may yet be permitted to do some good to this poor long trodden down
Africa, the gentlemen over whom you have the honour to preside will I doubt not
all cordially join. David Livingston