

Letter to John McRobert and Catherine McRobert, 5 June 1844

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001] Mabotsa 5 June 1844

My Dear M^{rs} M^cRobert

I expected to have heard from you long before this as it is now the fourth time I have written you and considerable intervals have always elapsed between each. But though hope deferred maketh the heart sick I cannot say mine is in that state yet, and perhaps the reason is we in this outlandish region are so constantly obliged to defer our hopes we at last become used to the employment.- I shall now give you some account of what is doing here [^] [in order] that you may understand we are not unmindful of our obligations to your exertions. And first of all I may mention that your agent Mebaloe (alias David Molehane) has since we came to this sphere of labour given us entire satisfaction in all the operations requiring manual labour he has worked with us in a manner which shews he is in earnest and his addresses to his countrymen are characterized by good sense, affection and faithfulness. M^r Edwards took him lately to a number of villages situated near the Kureechane in order to introduce him to the people and I intend in a day or two to do the same in a number of villages of the Makone situated North East of us. There are about a dozen villages around us, some of them of considerable size and situated conveniently for itinerary to which we intend paying stated visits. Mébaloe will take a part in this labour and we hope the Lord will incline the hearts of his countrymen to listen to the words of life from his mouth. A long continued application of the truth to their minds seems the only mode by which æ by the Divine blessing it can find its way to their hearts their minds are so thoroughly absorbed by what is seen they never once bestow a thought on what is invisible. Every motion of their souls has a reference to earth & to that only. and as this has been the case from generation to generation they seem to have sunk as far as human nature can go. At one period they seem to have worshipped

[0002]

animals But if I am not wrong in my conjecture that idolatry degenerated so far that only the mere vestiges of it now remain, these remnants of animal worship are the facts that each tribe is called by the name of an animal, By it they swear, In general neither kill nor eat it, Sometimes they wont look at it & say it is the friend of their tribe thus the name Bakhatla is literally they (of the) monkey, Battapi, they (of the) Fish, the Bakwain, they of the crocodile Bachuéne they of the Baboon. The Barolong if asked by what they swear invariably answer "we dance to iron", and in hunting they kill a khoodoo, a magnificent animal of the antelope kind invariably make loud lamentations before commencing to flay it. As yo yo yo we have

killed our father, yo yo yo &c. believing if they do not make a sort of weeping some of them will die in consequence of the neglect But whether animal worship was formerly prevalent among them or not they now give that place in their affections so entirely to the creature which belongs to the Creator they know of nothing superior to the possession of oxen & plenty of milk from their cows their depravity seems subnatural and a considerable time appears to be required before they are raised to the level of sinners in other countries this view may be the effect of my unbelief but we find that conversion is always a slow process among Bechuanas In the Lattakoo district the gospel has effected wonders on the whole population so much so indeed they are not to be compared to the Bakhatla. You will of course understand when I speak of a change effected on the whole population I do not refer to the new phases of character which the gospel has developed in believers But to the unconverted and to those other than saving influences of Christianity which so materially modify the social system at home. There the general conviction has been produced that there is a God, that man has some relationship to Him - that this life is but the beginning of our existence and death but one event in a life which is ever-lasting - there are still a great want in the moral feeling and

[0003]

strange stupor & somnolence of conscience But compared to what they were and what the Bakhatla now are the former are enlightened & civilized. Yet even at Lattakoo the process of conversion is slow. A not much quicker rate obtains than there was in the churches of D^{rs} Haugh & Wardlaw when I was in Glasgow. (O these good men, my heart warms to them everytime I look up at their portraits I seem to hear their voices yet even in the still still quietness of the desert. words from some ministers enter right into the soul and glow there for ever. O that I had the tongue of the learned & wisdom to win souls) It is the greatness of the change - Christianity transforming Bechuanas (I have not a word expressive of the extreme of degradation) into men, that constitutes the wonderful cause for gratitude. I believe it is a greater miracle than instantaneous cure of the blind would be to them. It arrests more attention than any physical change I have occasionally been called to cases of imminent danger and the disease simulating another had I not had the benefit of the the [familiar instructions of] most eminent medical men in London I should probably have mistaken complaint & treatment & the case ended fatally. But proper treatment here administered restoration to health quickly followed But notwithstanding that and my having travelled 40 miles sometimes sixty under a burning sun & spending nearly the whole of several nights watching in their huts, [besides providing medicine] the cure instead of arresting attention scarcely secured thanks from the individual But let a man turn from his evil ways to serve the Lord and the whole country hears of it. The good are glad & the wicked cantunderstand the folly of the man who has ceased to follow the customs

of his ancestors. they are not all insensible to the benefits they have recieved by medicine But while that does much to secure their attention & sometimes affection the Holy Spirit gives more power-ful testimony to the truth of the gospel by the conversion of souls than we could give by the possession of the power of working miracles. Pray we beseech you that He may work mightily among the Bakhatla & surrounding tribes — My life was mercifully spared when in danger by the jaws of a lion, Mebaloe nearly lost his in his faithful endeavours to save me, both of [us] [^] were much hurt, he

[0004]

in the thigh & I in the shoulder & arm, the bone of the latter being smashed to peices and twelve gashes besides. But through the tender mercy of our God we are both now quite well May the spared lives be entirely devoted to the glory of our Great Deliverer. It was he who saved and he who healed my wounds Blessed be his glorious name for ever & ever I think I mentioned several objections against sending clothes to the people of this country for gratuitous distribution, these do not apply to those lately brought by M^r Moffat, they will be given as rewards for labour on the station & will besides giving a taste of civilization save the funds of the society & wont destroy their feeling of independence so as to make them any greater beggars than they naturally are And now my dear Friend I must bid you again farewell. May you both be favoured with every needed blessing Yours affectionately

David Livingston

Home of Rev D^ePhillip Cape Town

Rev.^d I. M^cRobert

Cambuslang near

2 Sheets Glasgow