

## Letter to William C. Oswell, 20 September 1852

*Livingstone, David, 1813-1873*

Published by Livingstone Online ([livingstoneonline.org](http://livingstoneonline.org))

[0001]

Kuruman 20<sup>th</sup> September  
1852

My Dear M<sup>r</sup> Oswel

You will see by the date of this that I am much slower in my movements than I anticipated when we parted. I have met many obstacles in my way. One of them for instance the complete breaking down of one of the wheels of M<sup>r</sup> Conibrick caused a delay of more than a fortnight. All the spokes parted company with the nave at what a poetical person would call "one fell swoop" The different causes of detention vexed me rather But now I find they were the means in the good Providence of God of preventing me from falling into the hands of the Boers and being stripped of everything. the proclamation of their independence by the Gov<sup>t</sup> - according to the recommendation of Major Hogg (who by the way is lately dead) and public dinners given to Pretorius at Bloemfontein & Natal, seem to have been given a fresh impulse to their policy & spirit for on the 28<sup>th</sup> ult. they appeared in the Bakwain country. They were 600 strong and had about 700 of the Eastern tribes with them. they detached a party with four waggons to my house before the main body went out to Sechele's town at Limane. these broke open the house - tore all my books and scattered all the boxes in the hollow below. They took out the medicines and smashed the bottles against the rocks. Broke the wooden chairs, carried away sofa, bedstead table, dishes &c &c. and a good quantity of coffee & tea & sugar &c &c belonging to Webb Coddington, Green, Macabe &c. Also the smiths forge anvil - [3 corn mills] and all our tools both smith' & carpenter's. On 29<sup>th</sup> they went in a body to near Limane drew up their waggons in order - filling up the spaces with bushes. [A party in the meantime] went to Church in the Khotla or public place of meeting. Mebalwe conducting the service - and after the afternoon service they informed Sechele that they had come to fight because he had refused to prevent Englishmen going North, that the whole country had been given to them by the Gov<sup>t</sup> and they had resolved to put down chieftainship. and he must send away his wives and children. He replied that he was a man of peace - that he would not molest Englishmen seeing they always treated him well &c On Monday they began their attack on the town by firing with swivels They communicated fire to the houses. this made many of the women flee and the heat became so great the men huddled together on the little hill in the middle of the town - the smoke prevented them from seeing the Boers though the latter saw them huddled in groups. they killed 60 Bakwains and 35 boers

fell - and a great number of horses. Sechele shot 4 boers with

[0002]

with his two double barrelled guns. when they made a dash at the hill, one bullet passing through two men, and a bullet went through the sleeve of his coat. these 60 are those whom they counted near the town Sechele thinks others may have fallen among the women who ran away - these are not yet counted. they maintained their position one whole day on the hill, cutting off the boers every time they came near. the Boers continued their firing with swivels till the evening and then retired. the Bakwains having no water fled from Limase during the night, and the Boers did not feel inclined to follow them - [Some of] the women and children who were captured ran away & reported that two of the boers who were wounded died after leaving. The town being burned of course all the corn it contained was consumed. Parties on horseback went out either during the battle or afterwards and took all the cattle of the Bakwains to be found near. The chief cattle posts are in the Kalihari. All Paul's Mebaloe's and my cattle are taken. I had but few however. The whole of Sentuhe's cattle were taken too. His people did not fire a shot. the Boers killed three Wanketse - burned the town and all their corn of course. they met as if by accident Mosielele's cattle & swept them off. they were fleeing Kahihari wards they did not fire a shot either. Mosielele had fled from Mabotsa and M<sup>r</sup> Edwards fled to M<sup>r</sup> Inglis place. M<sup>r</sup> E attempted to expostulate with them and they took out an achter or sambok to him. They seem very anxious to get a hold of me. Frequently expressed a wish to that effect. I am not conscious of ever having done anything offensive. Nor can I see anything in Sechele's conduct to them which I can call bad. The oxen of the English, Webb &c and those of Motsahona and Api are gone too. Webb Codrington &c are gone to Sebituane's. I shall write you again as soon as I hear from them how matters stand in that country. Api came to an outpost of Mosilikatse and the people gave him ten tusks and pressed him strongly to go to the old gentlemen but Api was afraid and got off by promising to go next year. Viljoen & Pert [5 or 6 in all] Jacobs went in again to the Lake and a party is sent off by Sechele to cut them off. Viljoen's wife entreated the Commando of Boers not to go till her husband should return - but in vain. And it will be a miracle if he escapes. Another party of Boers about thirty in number also went in and they are to be cut off too. Then a sort of guerilla warfare is to be commenced. They would have listened to Viljeon's wife but expected their cannon would make Sechele flee instantly to the desert. Considering that it is the first

[0003]

battle the Bakwains have fought with guns they did well. I feel sorry for them. All improvement is at an end in the country around the boers may find Magahesberg soon as insecure as the frontier is. Stealing cattle is more agreeable to their natures than labour. and the

boers are to blame for beginning the war. All the corn being burned or carried off. The people must either steal or starve. This you will say is far from orthodoxy. but I am not saying what ought to be but what is likely to be - I have lost a good deal but will now move so much more lightly than I would have done had they let me alone. I cannot conceive what pleasure it could give them to tear my books and waste the medicines. I had a very fine selection of medical books, and the medicines I kept with great care because very pure and sent out from England by a friend of mine in consumption. Being a medical man he selected them with great care and knowing that his lungs were gone he told me to be sure and write soon & let him know of their arrival for if I did not he would not be there to receive it. Webb's party has been warned to keep apart from Viljoens's party so I think they are quite safe. Sechele lost his waggon too. also a waggon belonging to Macabe.

George is with me on a trading speculation. M<sup>r</sup> Rutherford advanced £100 to enable him to make a trial and I lent my second waggon in order to enable him to spend most of his money in goods. and in consideration for the use of the waggon he is to assist me in building. I am not sure whether I mentioned to you in my last that finding M<sup>r</sup> Montagu had not left the copy of your map in the colonial office I gave a copy to be kept in the colonial office and a note taken of the discovery as an authority as to it having been effected by Englishmen viz you & myself. I found out the above when I had to go to Lieut. Gov<sup>r</sup> Darling for powder He knew nothing about M<sup>r</sup> Montagu's copy. Indeed had never seen any till he saw my copy. - I also gave a rough copy of my letter to the Geog. Society to the Advertiser. this was some time after you left and I may have told you already. I made some enquiries after the map which you lost and all I could learn about it was that M<sup>r</sup> Arnot sent it to Algoa Bay. He did not send it by post. I shall settle with the man at Motito who kept your oxen and also with Sechele

[0004]

Sechele sent the property he took from Moyle out to M<sup>r</sup> Moffat my 10 guns and 21 oxen. they are now at Kuruman Moyle tried to go to Lehututung I do not know whether he has succeeded. Shelley and Richard Orpeu went trying to go through the desert too. lost his oxen and his servant Adam came here a short time ago for fresh oxen. Shelley is lying somewhere West of Sequagua Pomores & Skete & others reached Lehututuñ - found no elephants and are waiting for rain to get back again. Sechele's children are here for instruction. they live with M<sup>r</sup> Moffat I would go away now but am suspicious of the second party of Boers. they are thirty in number and would probably plunder our waggons. And supposing I should meet some of them fleeing they might look on me as the instigator of the

Bakwains. I expect to be blamed now more than ever  
It is not improbable I shall be represented as fighting among the  
Bakwains. I feel very anxious to get away. As soon as the hunters  
come out I shall know how to stir. At present I dont know  
whether the Boers have retired for good. Upwards of 300 boers  
were cut off by the fever. Old Austin and all his family fell  
victims. All the friends here are as usual. M<sup>r</sup> & M<sup>rs</sup> Moffat  
present their kind regards. I heard of your arrival at Sierra Leone  
have not yet heard of M<sup>rs</sup> L. in England.that God may bless  
and reward you for all your kindness to me and mine is the  
constant prayer of yours affectionately D Livingston

Care of Rev<sup>d</sup> W Thompson  
Cape Town  
prepaid  
W C Oswel Esq  
8 Gloucester Terrace  
Regent's Park  
London