

Letter to Robert N. Hayward, 17 July 1843

David Livingstone

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[0001]

Kuruman 17th July 1843 [MS 8/2]

My Dear Hayward

Your kind and excellent letter afforded me quite a treat and I feel it merited sincere thanks and a more prompt acknowledgement. But having been during most of the time that has intervened far away from the region of postage I must be excused for what you may have considered a long delay. I hope you will not follow the example I have been compelled to give but write me again as soon as convenient. Everything from home is interesting so need not be at no loss as to the filling up of a letter much longer than the last

When I left England the Directors of our Society expected that Mr Moffat would soon follow & by his knowledge of the people & country assist us in choosing a locality for a new mission, instructed me to remain at Kuruman and endeavour to acquire as much of the language as possible before his arrival. I did not however find it so difficult as they imagine it to be and finding too that frequent interrupted intercourse with the natives was the best way of acquiring an almost unwritten language I very soon set off in order to obtain knowledge of the country & people for myself. I have had three long journeys into the interior, two of them occupied no less than 4 months each, yet I did not reach Timbuctoo nor did I see anyone who had been much farther than myself. A great fresh water lake lying a little beyond my farthest point north is the great barrier to penetrating far in that direction. It stretches from north [East] ~~West~~ to South West and should anyone take in a boat he might explore a great extent of country with very little trouble. The natives have canoes upon it and it is called from them the Lake of Mokhorro (of the canoe) or according to the names of different nations living on its banks as of the Botleth [&c]

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The great drawback to travelling in the country is the slowness of our locomotives. The heavy lumbering Dutch waggon & the riding ox are the only conveyances unless we choose to try our own lower extremities, I have been as far north as Lat. 22° S.

and then is beyond every other European

During my last journey I should probably have seen the lake had my people not been deterred from following me by

a dread of Mosilikatze. I saw some women who had been taken captive by his men last. They escaped & - reached the Bakwain country (on the Tropic) during the time I was there. It had taken them nearly two months to reach it & had subsisted by gathering the roots of the desert as then food by day & climbing a high rock for protection by night. The sight of these poor creatures was enough for my people near very weak hearts seemed to die within them, indeed they buried their noses in the sand as if the Arabian simoon had been passing & declared it was madness to go a step near the tyrant. I was then obliged to leave them & go forward on ox back with only the wild Bakwains as my guides, our diet consisted of all kinds of flesh that came within the range of any gun & all sorts of roots when meat was wanting. Sometimes we had plenty & at other times we feasted on what we saw in our dreams. I visited many new tribes & was soundly treated by all. I had some intercourse with lions but thanks to kind Providence I did not receive hurt from any. The journey was more than two hundred miles beyond the place in which I left the wagoon yet the climate being fine I enjoyed the best of health although sleeping consistently on the bare ground. No consequence of the long intercourse with the natives which these journeys [0003]

afforded I soon acquired faculty in expressing myself in the language & now it is nearly as natural to me as this English. The knowledge of the country ~~too~~ which I have acquired has been of service too for the Directors have instructed us to begin a new mission a spot chosen by me although Mr M has not yet arrived. It is very near to the place where Mr Campbell in his progress of discovery thought proper to turn about & go home. The iron works he heard of but was not permitted to see are situated there, the same reason which prevented him getting a sight of them prevails now & it is a fear lest the iron should become bewitched by the presence of a stranger, they will not allow anyone who has had intercourse with the opposite sex since the commencement of the period in which they annually smelt the ore, To approach the furnaces. Iron bewitched you will say what is that. It is simply the effect of a too energetic working of the bellows and when they take out the iron burned to a cinder they exclaim behold the effects of witchcraft. The evidence is so clear & there before their eyes no one attempts to doubt it. They then apply a larger portion of their prophylactics against witchcraft, put in fresh ore & begin the process anew. All the people employed in these works sleep apart from their wives during the period of smelting. Their implements are most original. The same I suppose as were invented by old Tubal Cain a piece of the bark of a tree folded on itself with tongs

a stone is the forehammer and another the anvil of these antediluvians, yet they manage to make pretty neat work of it. The ore is found in great abundance & not covered by any soil which will be an advantage to our new settlement

[0004]

I may mention here that all the notions of these people concerning medicine are connected with the suggestion that witchcraft is extremely practiced. Indeed they seem to behave that no one would ever die unless he were bewitched, their doctors suck out all manner of things from the [...] res for their patients - these are exhibited & I believed to have been put into the body by some witch, no good is done to a patient nor evil prevented except by their agency. Hence when I happen to cure an individual they immediately ascribe it to my powers as a wizard. They think too it is no matter how medicine is applied provided it is only near to the patient. If I give a child medicine & don't watch the mother will pour it on its head or drink it herself. Not matter how nauseous the dose is if a patient expresses dislike to it some fellow standing by will gulp it down instantly. If a man is guilty of stealing from his relatives they give him an emetic in order to make him vomit his bad propensity and the chief of the Bakwains shewed me a root which he powdered & sprinkled on his legs in order to cause him to run fast. The friends of another chief were very angry with me because having assisted him they asserted that instead of giving medicine to cure his disease I had given him some to change his heart. Some actually believed that I could raise the dead and perhaps it is owing to my supposed knowledge in the black art I have never yet had any thing stolen since I came to the Bechuana country, you will perceive by these details that their notions of medicine are quite puerile, their knowledge on all other subjects is quite as much limited, a few fables contain all they have deserved from their ancestors and with respect to the future all to them is darkness

[0005]

The impurities they practice I cannot mention, They follow out [MS /8/2] the principles of Owen the socialist as far as they will go & though each woman has her husband who fathers her children promiscuous intercourse is almost universal. Those gentlemen who admire the morality of the heathen would do well to examine before they sound its praises. The Bechuana are great cowards yet if they can kill when there is little chance of being themselves killed they murder without compunction. They make long incisions on their body the scars of which are their "scars of honour" the memorial of having murdered helpless women & children, they are proud

of these scars & are not ashamed to point out those they have made in remembrance of having killed females
A man is not ashamed either to say he cannot carry a small burden and he will go & call his wife to do it
These degraded beings we hope to raise to the level of humanity & civilization. If it were to be done by our means I should despair but it is to be effected by the power of God and this causes me to hope. Much has already been done. There then is a church of about 300 members. Many can read well & generally they are clothed & partially civilized. We hope the location to which I shall soon remove will be another centre of height & civilization & that good will ultimately be done to the distant interior. The people to whom we go are called the Bakhatla. They live about 20 miles beyond the spot where Mosilikatze was seen by M^r Moffat
I lately walked over what was once the site of his town & where he suffered his last defeat by the Boers
[0006]

The grass had recently been burned off the country so I got a good view of the whole & a few human bones were all I could discover of all that belonged to Mosilikatze, He is now situated about 350 miles North East of his former location, But still goes on in his murderous career, Last year he sent out a marauding party which scoured all over the Interior, and swept away all the cattle that came within their grasp. Many were killed & the rest of the people are now living in holes in the rocks. This applies more especially to the Bamangwato, Bakoa & Makalaka all of whom I have visited. They live on the summit of a very high range of basaltic rocks. The same, I believe at no very distant date of active volcanic operations, there are many large cup shaped cavities in these rocks, with flat bottoms & perpendicular sides destitute of vegetation, some of them as large as Finsbury Square & more than 300 feet deep they are rent & riven in every direction, and in some parts covered with huge fragments which falling down & infringing on each other & the rocks below form innumerable cavities into which these tubes flee for shelter from their enemies. I entered one & it was capable of containing a hundred individuals the entrance being so small a dozen men could stand & defend it against the ingress of a single individual & he crawling on all fours. These holes as well as those in the Bakwain country are covered with a totally different vegetation than that which exists on the plains on the latter it is principally of a thorny stunted character but as soon as you ascend the former thorns entirely disappear. Fig trees abound &
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The netile shoots up tea tree 30 feet high & more than two

in diameter. The tree which yields the Bushman poison
is also there very large. There it is a mere shrub.
I hear it is stated at home that M^r Moffat intends to go with
the interior on a sort of exploring journey, I
hope he may not fall a victim of the fever which
then prevail. Near the Lake Mokhorro they are very
fatal to the natives. Towards the East of our to be
station they also prevail & are very destructive to the
inhabitants of De Sagoa Bay. Besides a fly exists
in that region or rather N.E. of it which biting
the oxen destroys them as soon as the first one
falls.

The Boers from all I have seen of them, appear
to deserve the character you bestow but you would not
choose to mingle much with them. They are kind &
hospitable but very ignorant. Indeed the majority of
them are destitute of that general information which
makes company agreeable. They have not the means of
informing themselves & have been the dupes of a set
of unprincipled men in the Colony. I cannot go into
the subject at pre[...] ent but I believe they are [...] ore to be
pitied than blamed. The Colonial government has as large
a share in their misdemeanour as any one else.
They are generally such as respect religion But the frequent
commission of the grossest immoralities by them makes
me doubt whether they possess much more than they farm
Their language is easy & resembles the Scotch but not
having come much in contact with them I can only
speak the colloquaen dialect, & not very good at that.
[0008]

I need not give you any information respecting their recent
rebellions [...] or of the imbecile dealings of the Colonial
government as I am persuaded you will have heard of all by
means of public papers

~~Care of Rev^d D^r [...] hillip, Cape Town~~
R. Hayward [] Esq^{uire} [M^r]
~~Victoria Crescent~~
~~Ramsgate~~
England
[6/1]
11 Church St
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London

I hope you will find time & inclination to give me a long letter
I should like to write Houlton but dont know his address
I am happy to hear that you have passed the college and
beg leave to congratulate you on the event. But perhaps

long ere this reaches you. The pains & fears of the examination
will all be forgotten.

Believe me yours sincerely

D.