

Letter to Parents and Sisters, 29 September 1841

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Kuruman 29th September 1841

My Dear Parents & Sisters

In case I have no other opportunity of writing you previous to setting off towards the north I now begin. I am sorry I had not one ready yesterday when a Griqua passed this way I sent several to friends & I hope this wont be long behind any of which you may hear

I am busy learning the language which is not remarkably difficult the only impediment is a want of proper aids such as Dict^s Grammars &c I hope however soon to conquer it & then preach Christ & him crucified to the [...] Bechuanas I have a great deal of work in the way of helping the infirm & many of them seem attached to me on account of little attentions shewn to themselves or children of whom they are remarkable fond. Mothers are mothers I see all over the world if only a little if only a little of poor humanity remains uncorrupted by the customs of sin. How is my mother I Hope comfortable May God bless her and give her an inheritance with the blessed in Heaven by sanctifying her to himself

I have got no letter as yet from you & have now written you 5. It is no easy matter to have all the correspondence to oneself but I hope they are on their way Well what shall I tell you about, I suppose Janet & Agnes would like a lion story or something of that sort that I cant however give for I have not dared to look one in the face. A terrible fellow was shot a short distance from this & the sight of his dead body so (shall I say) frightened me I have no wish to have intercourse with his majesty again. I would rather meet with some [^][members] of the Royal families among men than of beasts for the former in this country at least are an insignificant race of beings, distinguished for nothing but superior impudence in begging & generally worse looking than any of their attendants. I have been in company with Waterboer the Griqua chief. He is rather an exception in point of intellect although in bodily appearance he is a little bushman of the Matebeleour chief was here a few weeks ago for the purpose of being baptized & admitted into the church, a feeble

decrepit old man tottering into the grave. After he had carelessly heard the offers of mercy for about 25 years we trust he has now turned to the Lord. His baptism has caused great excitement through the whole country particularly amongst the violent opponents of the gospel. I hope it will lead others to think of themselves

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& look for mercy before it is too late. the Bechuanas are great beggars, indeed they seem to make it a matter of conscience to neglect no opportunity of asking & a refusal does not by any means put them out if it is done in a jocular way It is only occasionally they think it worth while to tell you what their opinion of you is & really it is ludicrous enough to hear their epithets, instead of getting vexed by them they always powerfully excite my risible faculties. Only think of an old grey headed ~~fat~~ man or woman coming forward & saluting me with the epithet "Father, king, Gentleman &c &c and then after a little conversation requesting as a great favour a knife handkerchief or only a little bit of my shirt to bind their heads & when I give them the hint that though I much wish to gratify my children it is quite out of my power. My father or mother adopts quite a different style & tells me "Verily thou art a dog tiger" &c "and whoever marries you will marry a wolf" these paternal addresses have one good effect they usually bring something to my mind which sets them off in good humour When Moteeke was with us during the whole fortnight he never begged any & for this he formerly was notorious, the sisterhood will be amused to know I was physician to his majesty but I nearly got into disgrace by shouting out to him as he lay asleep in the middle of the path at midday with his karross over his head Hallo my lad this is not night. He awakened with a start when I beheld who it was I stooped down & examining his eyes told him I should give him some ointment for them in the afternoon. He seemed quite well pleased & thanked me for my care of him

When talking to him of his past life he always commenced crying like a child. this is remarkable for a Bechuana & particularly for a king, they never weep untill the Spirit works upon their hearts & then they weep like children. Sometimes in the chapel they hide their heads in their karosses & creep under the forms to avoid the eyes of the preacher. this however wont do they then scream out & occasionally rush out of chapel fleeing with all their might. It has often made me wonder for in performing most severe surgical operations they sit both men & women as if they had no feeling - In one case of fungous 4 inches in length & nearly 2 in breadth [nearly 1/2 in height] I employed a severe but quick mode of getting rid of it. During the operation

I expected him to get up & dance from the pain But no. He sat immoveable & talked with as composed a countenance as if he felt nothing, "A man like me never cries" said he with the greatest composure. "Its only children who cry"

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The spirit of God alone can affect their health. Without this aid all our efforts must be ineffectual

There are many believers scattered up & down the country even far from this & where all is opposition (apparently) the missionaries are pleased to know that there is piety even in the centre of the opposition. Pious women particularly are often found where none were[are] expected and often it is impossible to hold intercourse with them as it would subject them to great annoyance from their heathen husbands. Only a shred of this can be said where much is needed. We hope however the Lord will uphold his own work in their hearts & enable them to persevere unto the end. the women have hard work to perform amongst the Bechuanas - they cultivate the ground and build the houses while the "Lords of the Creation" sew karosses milk the cattle & hunt or sleep. they make very neat builders indeed. It would puzzle their men to do half as well and if the latter are spoken to about it they reply "O it is good for them" "it makes them strong" &c. It is only a very few of the younger people who can be inclined to do a little of women's work & I dare say their own opinion that hard work makes makes their wives look soon old has more influence over them than any of our arguments. When sitting round a fire by our waggon I have sometimes tried to let the women have a share of it by requesting the men to give way, but that was out of the question. "We are the kings" was [...] a sufficient reason for the women being compelled to [...] [quite] behind in the cold. How would Agnes like this system of things

The old spectacles [ks?] mother put with my bag were a most acceptable present to an old woman who made great efforts to learn to read but her nose not being of proper shape for the antique thing to adhere by[on] their own natural way she must hold them always to with the hand. the beads are invaluable - money being of very little use & rather a losing concern as they will take nothing but silver & they always prefer a few beads or a handkerchief to it [...] . M^r Hamilton has just returned from an [^][itinerating] journey of a month or nearly 200 miles towards E by north. He met great opposition in some places & encouragement in others He is quite well in health and so I am thankful to say we all are. Fergus & David still within reach of you I should have written them but feared they might be removed ere my letters arrived. I hope to write M^r Naismith soon as also S^l & Jⁿ. Remember me kindly to them. Could they not write me my letter will cross

theirs on the way if they do. How is Duncan? I suppose
gone to America - & I Wheeler? D^o. The sun shines
down our chimnies here. Yours affect^y D L

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I can write no more to Charles He is a shabby fellow for a
correspondent. Tell him I say so. I think frequently of you
all but this language engages mixing thoughts. I am never
pleased with the progress I make, the natives do jumble
their words so together & then they are so stupid at underst-
anding if there is any blunder in my sentences. But I hope
soon to overcome. I shall after returning live entirely
amongst them & speak not a word of English, I must
conquer. Yesterday a man came to carry medicine for his
wife whom I had just been to see. I gave him instructions to let her have it immediately.
Before I could say stop the
fellow had it whisked into his own stomach. Although not
very agreeable (castor oil)[a large quantity] he yielded prompt obedience to what he
thought I wished, & the reason was I did not use the phrase most
commonly employed. the people here are much like what the
patriarchs must have been. they are all nomadic if they
can possibly find a few cattle. Some are mighty hunters, not
your red coated gentry after a fox - I know men here who
have attacked lions & killed them with no other weapons than
an asagai in one hand & the Kaross wound round the other
arm to thrust into his mouth - the mill is more original
still than that of the two women which I have seen in use
in the colony, a flat stone (broad) with a little roundish one to rub
with a sort of shoving motion as women in Scotland do with
their clothes at the bottom of the tub. I can understand
why Rachel felt so much at being barren, nothing is so
great a curse to a B. wife as want of children, they are really
miserable if without & children are so valuable.

the heat is beginning. North winds sweeping over the long tract of country in that direction
become
so heated when they come here they are like the blast of a furnace, sometimes crumble the grass
into
powder

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