

Letter to William Thompson, 17 September 1853

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Sekeletu's Town 17th September
1853

My dear Man

Your letters are "necessarily brief" So you say. and I am bound to believe the Right Reverend Father William Capeton seeing her hath recieved two students from Hankey into his ghostly care. Ah, mine are necessarily long. long winded or flatulent, as a follower of Esculapius expresseth it, the reason whereof lieth in an immense sheet of paper which must be filled for Nature abhorreth a vacuum, and want of time to shorten them

The Directors and you are wonderful men. The former decline to write concerning certain minutes of committee though informed that no meeting will take place till such writing has been recieved. And they at same time coolly tell me that they hope I shall derive counsel assistance &c &c. from the committee of which no meeting can take place. Then you if I recollect aright twitted me about our Committee being defunct and yet presume the matter of a companion will come before it. But who will go? I am gone. No matter my compassion can follow. The Directors requested Ashton to leave the Kuruman and settle with a tribe as I had done. He refused. Subsequently M^r Freeman proposed in Committee held at Kuruman that Ashton should go to Borigelong. He refused by saying "It would be like taking M^{rs} Ashton to her grave" "Then you must take the entire charge of the printing press (M^r Moffat had till then done the printing press work) and leave M^r M. to devote his entire time to Translation." This you will percieve settled him at Kuruman. M^r Moffat is the only man willing to go, but would it be advisable for him to do so. No certainly. But here I am after my ~~eight~~ 8th attack of fever. The last very severe being accompanied with large discharges of blood. It has made me quite thin, but as I am becoming old and skinney per process of time that does not matter much. I never laid by. but vertigo from exhaustion compelled me to give up some of my sedentary work. By the way it now glances accross my mind that the Daguerrotype portraits entrusted to M^{rs} De Somit had not in November last been delivered. I blame myself

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severely for entrusting them to a young man through his mother. She of course good woman wished to oblige but what thousands of gracious mothers have striven to make their sons appear obliging. Every one else understanding it was merely ~~an~~ efforts to make silk purses out of sow's ears though too much given to jesting tonight I am really very sorry for the loss I fear M^{rs} L has sustained. She feels it very keenly and I can not repair the loss. Please retain the medal in Cape Town till you hear from me. It is not likely I shall ever come your way again - Here one of your questions holds up its plury at me "Unless you discover a good way to the sea either to the East or West how are we in future to send men to the region of the Lake or to the parts beyond? For Lobale?" "In future" The dear man! how many has he sent in time past? "Unless you discover a good" &c. An indifferent one will do for those who have any pluck in them and for those who have none the old overland route may be safely recommended for they will discover some important & very large field of labour a long way South of the Orange River in which they will be associated with a Wesleyan - A church of England clergyman, A Dutch Predicant and a Government school master, each of whom consideres the 10 shanties and 8 shopkeeper's houses as his "sphere of labour" involving the most excruciating responsi bility

I was delayed long at Kuruman by the Boers and want of people for all feared to go North. but having got over these difficulties we made very good progress till we came into Lat. 19° 16' South. There all my people were knocked down by fever except one Bakwain lad. I managed the hospital and he the oxen and by God[']s mercy none were cut off. When we were able to move Northwards. the poor Bakwain lad took it too. I had to drive and cut a path too for keeping more to the Eastward in order to avoid the Tsetse we traveled through a densely wooded country in which the axe was in constant operation. But for two bushmen who managed the loose oxen and otherwise assisted we could not have moved. Some were still so weak we had to lift them out and into the waggon. When we came near the Chobe the adjacent country was flooded for 15 miles out. Vallies appeared like large deep rivers with hippopotami in them. We tried long ^ in vain to get a ford through one large river called Sanshureh our bushmen decamped too. So I took a small pontoon kindly presented by Mssrs Welch and Codrington and the strongest of my weak crew. crossed the Sanshureh. ½ a mile wide and went North to find the Chobe & people. We waded among reed and high grass for three days trying to obtain a passage in to the Chobe through the dense masses of reed &c which line its banks

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On the fourth day we obtained our object, launched the pontoon and after passing along about 20 miles we reached a Makololo village In their figurative language they said I "had come upon them as if I had dropped out of a cloud yet I came riding on the back of a hippopotamus" A rumour had reached the Makololo previously and two parties had been sent out in search of us. All our difficulties were now at an end. Canoes were soon sent down by the chief our waggons &c. were transported accross the country & river & after proceeding North in order to avoid the flooded lands on the other side, we turned S.W. & reached the town. Our reception was far more flattering than I could have anticipated. The chief just over 18 years of age said he rejoiced to obtain another father instead of Sebitoane and repeated[ly] requested me to name whatever I wished and he would shew his affection by giving it. cattle, ivory, &c &c and he seemed distressed when I refused to name anything - He is not equal in appearance or abilities to his father but there is nothing weak or childish in his conduct or conversation, and several executions which have taken place on account of conspiracy, shew that he is not destitute of Sebitoane's energy. He is afraid to learn to read at present "lest it should change his heart and make him content with one wife" as in the case of Sechele. I like a frank objection - one cannot get a hold on a "Ya Mynheer" They are too oily. I have just returned from a nine weeks tour through the country in search of a suitable location for a mission. Went up the Barotse River or as it is universally called by the Makalaka - the aboriginal inhabitants - the black race of whom I spoke - the Leeamb or "the River." reached the confluence of the Loeti with its light coloured water also that of the Leeba or Lonta. Londa is the proper nam[e] because it comes from Londa the capital of a large state. The confluence of the Londa and Leeamby is in 14° 11' South this is a point of great importance for the Leeamby. twins thence away to the East N. East. The Londa about 150 yards wide. (the Leeamby about 250 [yards] beyond it) The Londa coming from the N. & by W. or N.N.W. is. I dream yet to form part of our way West. Conveyance by water is of great importance with 6 paddlers we went 44 miles of Latitude in one day of 10½ hours and taking into account the windings of the river and our course being what sailors term a 2½ point one the actual distance must have been upwards of 50 Geographical miles The river is one of very great beauty & breadth. It is often more than a mile broad with islands 3 or four miles long in it. These are covered with sylvan vegetation. The rounded masses of which seem to recline on the bosom of the water. The Tsetse spoils the most beautiful and healthful spots. I must reserve details. but after a laborious search have not found a spot I could pronounce salubrious. We must brave the fever. It is God not the Devil that rules our destiny. Surely we may when slave traders do. I met

Arabs from Zanzibar subjects of the Imam of Muscat, who could write readily. And Portuguese from the Farthest trading station inland on the West. The latter probably through the influence of the Chevalier Du Pratt's letter and passport shewed me every civility An intrigue with an underchief who had pretensions to the chieftainship enabled the latter to drive a brisk trade in slaves in the Northern half of the Makololo country. Nothing was done here. to encourage them to call again. A stockade was erected in the Barotse country, a flagstaff for the Portuguese banner erected set up. A small cannon given to the pretender who it is supposed gave authority for the prosecution of the slave trade contrary to the orders of the chief. The conduct on the part of the merchant was very silly for no sooner was the intrigue known, than the chief conspirators were cut off and their bodies tumbled into the River On my remonstrating against bloodshed the answer given was "We are still Boers. We are not yet taught." They would have expelled the slave merchant too. but refrained on my representing that their doing so might injure me in the West and their departure is to take place soon. I go Westward as soon as the rains commence I have preached in many spot[s] where the name of Christ was never heard before. This is matter for gratitude. Hope the gospel will yet be established in these savage lands. I travelled in a company of 160 in 33 canoes. From the chief downwards all strove to shew kindness Nine weeks intimate intercourse - hearing their conversation, anecdotes quarrelling, roaring dancing, singing and murdering, have imparted a greater disgust at heathenism than I ever had before. And on comparison with Southern tribes a firm belief that missionaries effect a great deal more than they are aware of even when there are no conversions I am sorry you cannot be furnished with a correct sketch of the country which I have seen I have used the last bit of tracing paper for the Directors - 2 letters for America per Captain Holmes - a packet for D^r Tidman, 4 English & one Canadian letter

Prepaid

The Rev. W. Thompson
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Cape Town