

Letter to William Thompson, 13 September 1855

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Linyanti 13th Sept^r
1855

My Dear M^r Thompson

We have had an unexpected opportunity of sending letters back to Angola but the time afforded has been so short I have sent a few notes only. This will follow the Arab who left this morning and I hope will reach you some time or other and let you ^ know I am not unmindful of my friends though separated from them by a precious big lump of this which the philosophers call "our little planet"! I have scarcely had time to peruse my letters which we found had lain on an island in the Leeambye, close to falls of Mosioatunya a whole year. Such a rush of thoughts and trembling emotions when I opened letters from my family you may imagine if you can, taking it into consideration that I have been without information for nearly three years. Thank God I had no reason to sorrow. I requested my friends to write to Loanda, but though detained there for many mo ^ nths by sickness I never got a line. And I suppose their respectful silence may be translated into a rebuke for imagining that I should ever reach that port. "You think more highly of yourself than you ought to think" Well I must try and

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and be thankful even for that.

I commence the descent of the river for Quilimane at the beginning of October. The path we have already opened up has many advantages. The Portuguese post comes 3 times a month to Cassange 300 miles inland and goods are considerably cheaper than in the Cape Colony. I mean, such as

missionaries require coffee, tea, sugar, cloths &c
Labour is extremely cheap in Angola &
anything manufactured by the natives is got
for a trifle. I bought a pair of Wellingtons
boots at Pungo Andongo more than
200 miles from the sea for five shillings
and eight pence English money and
that was exactly the price given to natives
by a merchant of the place for one
pound of ivory. This is more than the
slimmest boer would get in Cape town
The difference in prices was explained by
the Americans giving larger prices than the
English. They have all the Loanda trade
in their hands. The advantage to the
natives is, out of sight, greater than in
the Colony Take Cassange and any
spot 300 miles inland from the Southern
coasts of S. Africa a native will get from
five to seven times more in the North
than in the South for his ivory. The

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trade of the Portuguese might have been pushed
much farther but as I saw the other day
in a history of Angola. A law was made
prohibiting white traders from going into
the Interior because in almost every case
in which war was necessary to punish
the natives for the murder of white men
investigation shewed that the white and
not the black man was the aggressor.
Black men "mão calçada" might be sent
with goods but no white man go
himself under a severe penalty. And this
law continued in force during successive
governments. I think it is still in
force for when I was coming through
Cassange lately the Commandant sent
an order to all the traders ^ (about 40) along the
River Quango & other places in the
vicinity to return to the village. and
on their refusal the matter was remitted
to the Governor of Loanda. there is no
restriction on trade except what is implied
in the above. It goes on briskly from
both coasts. Arabs and Portuguese are met
with everywhere. The latter are like our Griquas
namely, half blood. and it is curious they

have been found in the course of a few generations to become black again. The Portuguese marry black women there

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being very few white ladies in the country. And unlike our immaculate Transvaal congregation never disown their children. I made enquiry and found one person only whose children might answer like "Topsy" "Never had any father nor nothing" Persons of colour of respectability sit at the tables of the richest without as far as I could observe any distinction on account of race. And I met a canon of the church who was as black as caffre with short wooly hair, thick lips & he is greatly repsected and the gentleman with whom I was living had known him as having acted with uniform propriety in his high office for 28 years. He had just returned from a accompanying the prince of Congo to Portugal and the King had decorated him with one of the orders of merit as a token of approbation. I found the Portuguese exceedingly hospitable not to me alone but to all traders whom we met either going ~~and~~or returning. They are certainly

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equal in this respect to the Dutch of former times and to their descendants of the present day as I found them in the Western districts, not yet soured by the frequent visits of blackguard scoffing Englishmen. The black races in the vicintiy of the Portuguese settlements are immeasurably worse than the Southern tribes ~~of~~among which I have had experience. From the Casai to the orange River I should say to every traveller or trader Behave like a gentleman and you will be treated as such. Play the monkey be impudent and try to cheat and you will get "monkey's allowance"- the greater wickedness of the tribes North of the Casai admits of easy explanation, but you must

be content with my assertions only, for the present. When I can find time I shall let you into it. Rest assured it has not been caused by the ruffian Zendelings of the independants society. I was the first missionary they ever saw, and we were attacked four times by them. Plunder was their object, once we beat them off by simply sitting and looking at them after telling them they must strike the first blow. They were well supplied with guns and sometimes presented them at us. Another tribe began by plundering the goods carried

a disjointed sentence in your note about being satisfied with our position in the church seems to point to something not right in my last I dont remember it. I certainly never intended aught but civility

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by those of our party in the rear, firing and shouting ensued when we went back to them and the chief being busy leading inexpertly found a revolver within a foot of his stomach, and hostilities were quickly brought to a close without any one being hurt on either side. On several other occasions we were considerably bothered and it appeared as if we must fire, but in addition to a strong aversion to shedding human blood I had the school boy feeling of "strike your match" wonderfully strong. I wished if I must turn "soger" I had a parcel of Russians or Velschoons in opposition and not these poor ignorant savages. At present I firmly believe that we might go back without a tithe of the molestation we experienced, and two or three harmless visits would render the path as safe as a colonial one.. It is not likely I shall ever go South again except by Sea. My waggon stands as safe here as it would do in Mr Hoffmeyer's garden. Nothing was touched during our two year absence It is simply useless except as a house Canoes are the means of conveyance The Leeambye & Chobe rose unusually high this year and people went in canoes in nearly a straight line from

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Linyanti to Sesheke, about 130 miles. [I dont know where we shall settle except that it must be to the North of this. The country is finer there. We never carried water but passed two or three good streams each day all the way to Loanda. The natives are all armed with guns and swords and they have finished the game. The only fault of the new path is it admits of conveyance by human labour alone. The forests and boggy rivers present insurmountable obstacles to waggons. There is another path to the East coast which crosses at a certain point a Lake (Tanganyēnka) 3 days broad From the information I possess it would be easier to go that than the way down the Zambesi but like the path we have already opened it does not admit of waggons. Clearly then, the path of duty is that I leave the discovery of another Lake to somebody else, and try to get water carriage to the coast by going down the Leeambye]

A glance at a paper of /53 shews that ^ it is a believed the proper treatment of the caffres involves delivering over the whole of the Bechuanas & Griquas to the power of the Boers beyond the Vaal River. It is unfortunate for both parties and especially

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for the Boers, for if they were guilty of no fewer than eight during my residence in the country murderous attacks on tribes which in no instance ever attacked them, while fearing the English Gov^t. irresponsibility may now lead them to greater degrees of guilt. I never saw or conversed with them without feeling the deepest commiserations and distressing sorrow. Poor old Potgeiter and Pretorius are gone to the preserve of the all wise and merciful savior's I wish they had not forbid us to preach unto the gentiles that they might be saved

My companions, all Zambesians, behaved remarkably well. The governor sent a present of a generals dress finely

ornamented with gold lace, a sash
cocked-hat & sword, (A horse which
died) and the merchants, two bales
of different kinds of cloth, beads &c &c
and two donkies. They are not
affected by the bite of tsetse. Preparations
are making for returning with a great
quantity of ivory. Your policy to the Bechuanas

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and Griquas shews minds enlightened by the full jet
of the oxyhydrogen light of ^xt modern civilization What
a mercy it is the New consitution wont get the
credit of meeting measures for effectually driving
your northern trade into new channels! Will you
get another pound of ivory from the North bank
of the Chobe. If any one thinks so he had better
get some idea of the trade carried on by Mambari
Eastern Portuguese and Arabs from both coasts and
from parts which I need not mention. If
I had my will I would prefer English traders
to the others because they unlike my Transvaal
friends purchase no slaves. The Arabs maintain
bastard Portuguese and Mambari purchase cheifly for
domestic purposes and in this respect resemble
the marauders who carried off my school children
But they never interfere with our trying to
teach the way of Salvation. I shall never forget
the rage into which poor old Potgeiter got
when in the mildest terms I told him if he
prevented me from teaching the tribe Bahukeng by
means of old Paul the guilt would be his
He stuttered and at last called ^to another ^ answer me. The
Lord preserve us from blood guiltiness. The
Arabs pray in the mornings. They say Jesus was
a very good prophet but Mahomet was far
greater & better. They strike up great friendships
with me wherever we meet, calling me father &c
and telling the people how much we hate the

(free trade)

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slave trade in which they are engaged. I am very well
pleased to see you have lifted up your voice against
certain iniquities. Though I have not yet read the
pamphlets. onward my man. There are lots of
good men and true in the Colony who sympathize

with what is righteous and just. It is unfortunate
that they have been often spoken of as one and the
same with the worst portion of the Transvaal body
The sentiments & conduct are as different as those of
the English settlers in Australia are to the Ticket of leave
gentry. With kind salutations to Captain Holmes
and your family I am very affectionately yours
David Livingston

via St. Helena

Rev^d W^m Thompson

Cape Town

Cape of Good Hope

Forwarded by
E Gabriel Esq
Loanda