

Letter to John McRobert, 14 July 1843

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Kuruman 14th July 1843

My Dear Brother in Christ

I thank you for the good but little bit you appended to the excellent letter of your partner And I now take a separate sheet in order to provoke you to do the same. I do not remember to have seen you but if you studied at Glasgow we must often have been near each other & very likely we have looked on each others countenance in our attendance at the Academy lectures of D^r Wardlaw, 1836-7. But that is of little importance compared to the community of feeling which I trust we possess. Our hearts are drawn to the same centre of attraction and they long to see the benefits of the great Redemption realized by all the human family, & you make me glad by telling me of the progress of the good cause in Scotland and I wish I could give you as encouraging news from Africa Here however the chariot of the gospel goes on but slowly We have other materials to work upon than you, the people with whom you deal know immediately what you wish to be at But here the minds of the people are so earthly when we become acquainted with their modes of thinking it almost makes us believe we have not got humanity to deal with, our nature cannot sink lower that it has done in the case of Bechuanas their foolish hearts are darkened - their minds & conscience are defiled. As a nation they are the greatest cowards in the world. Afraid to speak of death and yet if they can kill without danger of being killed they glory in murder. In some of the Interior tribes I have seen men with from 30 to 40 scars - the marks of incisions made after each murder had been committed. they did not seem sorry for it but with an air of triumph have asked me to count the scars as if they were highly meritorious in having so many

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the females are the tillers of the ground & have all the heavy burdens assigned to them. A man is not ashamed to say he cannot carry a weight but his wife can & he will go & tell her to do it - their ideas of medicine are that all good is done & evil is prevented by witchcraft Hence they imagine that whatever way we use the medicine it will have the same effect. If a child refuses to drink medicine they will pour it on its head or drink it themselves. If their guns miss fire they ask medicine to heal them & Sechele chief of the Bakwain lately wanted me to give him some to make him run fast in

hunting. He shewed me a piece of root which he used for that very purpose. their music too is still in an state of embryo. two notes are all they possess and I have heard them droning away at them through the whole night. their language too is as simple as possible & very easily learned. It is an original tongue & in this respect somewhat resembles the Hebrew I know more than a dozen words in it which very nearly resemble the Hebrew one of which I may mention as it has caused me to believe the Septuagint rendering of Manna is the right one Mang yo? What is it this? is just what the Bechuanas would say if placed in the same position as the Israelites when they exclaimed What is it? But of course these instances in which it resembles that language are only accidental - All our theological terms have been recently coined & are not understood by the natives generally. Some the manufacture a very clever missionary are curious enough and I could give you some amusement by them were they not associated with a great disadvantage to the speedy progress of our cause. I shall give you a specimen of a word as good as could have been adopted in order to shew you the difference existing between our work & yours. the word for soul is one used for the breath, air or steam of a pot. the same I believe as in other languages but should we proceed to speak of it as the man without a number of explanations very likely our address would be interrupted by shouts of laughter. "What does the man mean by talking about steam? can we eat it, is it

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food that [^] [he] tells us so much about it"? this is not a difficult term to explain to them but some of the others are as unlike the idea we intend to convey as is the sound of a waggon wheel, this Theological language is a great hindrance. It requires a long course of training before they are brought to the state in which you can appeal to them on the subject of religion with the assurance that they are not taking up our words in an opposite sense from what we intend We know that the spirit is always in the word and that if presented according to His mind he will render it effectual But the earthly sense in which the natives have always used the words constitutes a great barrier to our doing so. If that influence is necessary any where and it is absolutely so everywhere how much more so here, where the minds of men are so deplorably degraded, nothing will peirce through this thick crust of ignorance which envelopes their souls but the power of the Almighty. Let us have your prayers for the manifestation of that power But you would require to be here to feel the utter hopelessness of our cause without it.

I have occupied so much space with these details I have very little room for anything else But you may feel interested in our modes of operation in itinerary. We have no railways herethe weary lumbering Dutch waggon drawn by oxon; a pack ox or our own lower extremities are the only

modes of conveyance. When we arrive at a village & wish to have a regular service we are obliged to ask the chief to collect his people, the place of concourse is the enclosure for the cattle, sitting down among them we begin by an address generally on one subject to which we confine ourselves as long as they seem attentive to what is said. If we speak on more than one subject they generally forget all we have said. And after the address we have prayer, if they have been accustomed to hear the gospel we sing but if not that is omitted, those who wish to depart then go away and with those who remain we get into conversation on the subject of the address and I believe more good is done by conversations than by formal addresses. they seldom ever object to what we

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have told them But many of them are bitter opponents to the gospel the old especially are our bitter enemies, they cannot bear the idea of parting with their younger wives nor the impurities to which they have long been accustomed, Of the old however there is as great a proportion converted as of the young, perhaps the proportion of the former is greater, it is certainly such as to strike one from England with surprise. I believe in England the conversion of the old who have long rejected the gospel is rare But here they have not become gospel hardened & perhaps this may account for the fact of their frequent conversion -

I lately saw in the country of the Bamangwato a son of Conrad Buys a runaway dutch boer who did immense mischief to the early missionaries. His father is dead & all his children 7 in number are either dead or in slavery to the ~~other~~ natives, the mother of the lad I saw was a native, he is in a wretched condition, speaks the language & is dressed as a native. He has forgotten all about God & Jesus, but remembers his father was accustomed to read a book kneel down to pray yet has forgot every word of dutch. His father was a most abandoned character But like the rest of the Dutch boers he had it seems a portion of our genuine [^] [Scotch] church going formality I felt sad as I looked on this poor relict, the seed of evil doers shall never be renowned.

the church here is in rather a low state just now and has been so for many months. We have had no stirrings among us since the commencement of the commotions in the Interior the rumours of wars seemed to occupy the minds of the natives to the exclusion of anything better. We hope the arrival of the new bretheren with M^r Moffat may prove a season of revival, they are now in the Colony But it is a long way off from this outlandish quarter May you enjoy the presence of your Saviour & with Him every Temporal & Spiritual blessing is the prayer of yours affectionately D Livingston

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