

Letter to David G. Watt, 7 July, 4 August 1841

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

Ontspanned, alias anchored in loco innomenato

7th July 1841

My Dear Watt

Your most welcome epistle I received at Colesberg & though of necessity a short one it proved quite a reviving draught in this thirsty land & this not so much by what it contained as by the flood of pleasing recollections it made whirl through my mind. I intended writing you from Cape Town & I assure you nothing prevented me fulfilling that intention but a strange fatuity which seized me there & made me really believe I should meet you there, We were a long time on the passage in consequence of having been obliged to put into Rio De Janiero & after coming to Cape Town we had to wait a month for our vessel unloading at Limon's Bay. I did not regret going into Rio It is certainly the finest place I ever saw. Everything delighted me except man. Even the "church Establishment" there is beautiful. They really do the things in style there. If even I form an Establishment it wont be either of the poor degenerate "sisters" at home but the good mother herself in Brazil But I must be very concise or I wont be able to give you even the heads of the discourse I have so much to say [to] [^] you. [I secured a series of letters "on the status & prospects of the Brazilian Empire for the Scottish Cong.Assy. by an American Episcopal methodist missionary there, a good sort of fellow, once a chaplain in the American Navy & [devoid of the characteristic cant of offEngl. Wesleyans]. We lived in his home during our sojourn. I think you would have liked him. Alas he is the only protestant near I in Brazil & all sects are tolerated. He can however do a little in the way of rooting out ignorance Tracts & bibles are circulated & some efforts might be expected were a most injurious influence not exercised by European visitors. These alone disgrace the members of the religion they profess by drunkenness. All other vices are common in Rio. When will the beams of divine light dispel the darkness of the beautiful Empire? The climate is delightful, I wonder if disabled Indian missionaries could not make themselves useful there?]

We left Algoa Bay on the 20th may & still we are a month from Kuruman We crossed the Orange 10 days ago at a rather difficult ford near hillappoba in navigating my ponderous vehicle through the stream I got aground & my oxen got "reel ral" some with their heads where their tails should be & others with their heads twisted round in the yoke so far they appeared bent on committing suicide or overturning the waggon. In this predicament I was glad to see an acquaintance of yours approaching from the other bank to my assistance. It was no other than "Sedras" who fortunately came to the ford on his way to Colesberg to buy goods with £10 he has scraped together somehow. He is a smart fellow & decidedly the best spearman of Bechuanas I have seen - I like travelling very much indeed there is so much freedom connected with our African manners. We pitch our

tent, make our fire &c, wherever we choose, walk, ride or shoot at abundance of all sorts of game as our inclination leads us. but there is a great drawback [...] cant study or read when we please, I feel this very much. I have made but very little progress in the language - (can speak a little dutch) but I long for the time when I shall give my undivided attention to it & thus be furnished with the means of making known the truth of the gospel

I was introduced by D^r Phillip to the Colonial Sec^y & the "cases" were promptly ordered I found three of them but most unfortunately an error in packing has caused the destruction of many of the glass vessels. I hope however to have as many as make one complete & if so I may say from what I have seen of the animals of this country it would be difficult to make it of some value to Mr Owen - I saw many specimens of agatized wood in the bed of the Orange, the concentric rings beautifully distinct & the pith chrystalized regularly & as clear as crystal. but the edges of the chrystals were mostly rubbed off by friction amongst other stones - In a plane about 50 miles from the river I passed an entire tree completely agatized & retaining so much of the original appearance I took it at first for real wood - It was broken into blocks of about a foot & a half in length. I took peices of it but I must not begin to describe all or any of the wonders I have seen. Any book of travels will supply with wonders ad infinitum?

The missions on this side the river are in a sad state. Every man's hand is against his neighbour. Whatever may have been the original cause of dispute the present state of feeling amongst our bretheren is most disgraceful Mr Moffat is not on speaking terms with the Guqua town missionaries & takes another route when visiting the Colony to avoid seeing them. They in their turn hate the bretheren in the Colony & amongst the whole there exists a pretty respectable amount of floating scandal one against the other. All uniting on this side to scandalize D^r Phillip. All on the other side generally favourable to the D^r & unfavourable to those on this side. The Devil is in it but they cant see him or rather wont. I am determined to stand aloof from both parties but because I attempted to set a couple of ~~at~~ anti Phillipites right, I am set ~~right~~ down

Augst 4th Kuruman. We arrived here on [...] July in Sabety. Sedras has been [...] most desperately wicked characters in K.. A determined resolute fellow above all his companions but now he is under strong convictions of sin. I saw him weep all day in chapel The Miss^s say his conversion will be a miracle greater than any they have seen

[0002]

down as a Phillipite myself & looked upon with suspicion by all the anti I confess I feel very differently on the subject of the D^r's superintendence now but you must not imagine I am in the least changed in my senses respecting thorough going independancy, the burden of M^r & M^{rs} Moffat's soup to me was always derogatory to the character of D^r & M^{rs} P.. This filled in with prejudice against the latter. A month's residence in their house during which time I had sufficient opportunities of scrutinizing their characters, has completely dissolved the whole of it. With respect to his superintendence, he told me he never had considered himself as anything more than the money agent of the Society. With spiritual affairs or modes of operation he had nothing to do & never wished to interfere in these matters but he had been

frequently compelled by the Society referring disputes to his decision to act a part he had no intention to, for generally one party was dissatisfied & he came his calumniator. He may have domineered in some instances but Mr M. is I understand not the man who would cast the first stone- The D^r is now in his dotage & wont do any more harm but were he in his vigour I should greatly prefer the despotism of one to that of the many. The later Mr M. seems bent on establishing & my poor neighbour here seems delighted with the idea of having a "Presbytery" I hope Griffith is a staunch Independant, you see the part I must act. The present system is real liberty compared [^] [with] committeeocracy I feel I am giving you a very partial view of the subject It would take a days talk to explain the whole subject. I cant fully explain the Colonial feeling. It is some what like caste in India. D^r Phillip has been the staunch advocate of the coloured population. There is a strong feeling amongst the Colonists against ~~the~~ him & them & strange to say most of the D^{rs} enemies have imbibed it. I mean of the missionaries. I wont say all but all I have seen certainly have- They divide into radicals & conservatives. They have not these names but it is of that nature. You would be a friend of the natives you would plead their cause against the boors, I know you would for I know your feelings on that subject and from this I conclude you would take sides with the D^r & his friends I cant help feeling friendly to him when I think of all he has done in the cause of liberty & when he tells me distinctly that he will not interfere at all in my operations, that he wishes all the miss^s to follow their own plans for these are generally the most efficient that they [as] [^] individuals can employ - [every one has a way of doing things & each can do more in his own way than he can by adopting the plans or modes of operation of another that he is only my money agent, the person who pays my salary on demand Why should I wish a change of affairs on the ground of the quarrels of another man? Whether it has been from the spirit of opposition that M^r Moffat has imbibed the Coloni feeling I know not but certainly he had a good quantity of it while here & of course was a favorite with the boors But he found no Colonial feelin in England. He spoke out just in the same strain that D^r P. always has done his speeches are full of affection to the African & it appears he says som thing about the boors in connection with the African. The speeches most unfortunately have found their way to this country & have given morta offence to the Colonists- They see he is a turncoat & are greatly enraged with him- The Ghram's Town Journal. (conducted by the Wesleyans) another "Watchman" has made known his inconsistency with joy. Altogether I sho not like to be in Mr Ms place when he returns. Instead of being the pet of the illiberals on account of his opposition to the D^r. He will now be received with suspicion by both parties. There was a great deal of sound sense & discrimination in your friend M^r Campbell's sentiments respecting D^r P.. I am sorry I ever said anything against him. I do not avow myself a friend or partizan of either but I certainly feel attached to the principles of the liberal rather than of the illiberal party This is rather a railed story but I dare say y will make out my meaning. The people in England have no idea of these matters & it is very difficult to give the full idea in few words to one not actually on the spot?

I find that the fresh water lake about which Mokoters told us is a pon about which there is an anxiety amongst all the Miss^s to do something. Every one would like to be the first to see it for it is quite certain that one does actually exist. The distance is 2 months in bullock waggons & no French

missionaries have it in contemplation soon to take a trip thither. One of them rather an enterprising character was shrined to become a corresponding member of the Geographical Society, but decline as he meant to give all his discourses to the [^] [Misss] Society & let them make what use of them they choose

I shall return to the Interior in about two months M^r Edwards is determined to accompany me
Yours DL

[0003]

His brother in law sounded me as to my intentions but got nothing out - M^r Moffat has got £400 from some gent. in Eng. for the purpose of fitting out our expedition to it This I heard incidentally. Ross blabbed it out in my presence to one of Mr M's chief friends at the Cape. I am afraid this will find its way to the ears of the French Miss.^s who will be sure to lose no time in setting out. If they give your humble servant a month or two to acquire the colloquial language they may spare themselves the pains of being first "in at the death". I can acquire the language while travelling, without this ponderous vehicle, as well as by remaining at Kuruman perhaps better for I shall live as they do & mix constantly with them & I can obtain information respecting the population &c. at the same time, I wish you were here to give me some lessons in composition, I am a bad hand at that having never studied it & my poor friend R. has such a precious idea of his extensive learning that I have not heart to ask him. I daresay I would after all stoop from my pride were I not fully concerned by all I have seen of him that he knows very little about that or anything else. He & I are not on good terms, because I speak out & pay no more regard to his opinions on ~~æœount~~ the ground of his 9 years education (his wife's heart) than if he were my [...] boy & could not read. I could have made something [...] D^r[...] [...] this man is [...] heard beyond [...] his wife is sensible but though married will remain an old maid to the end of the chapter. As for "olive plants round the table" Aheu fæ[u]gaces Post. &c. They are both adjuncts of or to Mr M. Nothing is right but what he has said. M^{rs} Sewell tells me in a letter I received at same time with yours that she believes you were heartily sorry you had not a help mate with you, I have told her I am sure you were not. I am conscious myself that I am better without & with respect to scandal arising amongst the natives no fewer than ½married Miss.^s have been charged with incontinency. The charge however in each case has been, I believe, quite groundless. I can be in no worse plight than they. Should anything of that sort arise. Mr M. himself is one of the number & D^r P.s believing the charge untill evidence was adduces to disprove it constitutes Mr M's chief objection to the D^r from these & other considerations which I need not mention I conclude that marriage, like vaccination in small pox, is not as speci[...] preventative to scandal in Africa. by the way tell me, if the matter from [...] is called "grease" of horse's heels is need in hidra in the same manner that the vaccinevirus is here & in Britain - all the Miss.^s wives I have seen denounce my [...] blessedness in no uncertain terms. Some even insinuated that the reason why I ask thus is I have been unable to ge[...] a spouse but I put down that very speedaly by assuming that it is a great [...] easier for a Miss.^y to get married in England than to come out simple as in [...] latter case a vigorous resistance must be made but in the former ou[...] yield up the affair into the hands of any friend & it is managed for you in a twinkling, only hold the neck down like one of our oxen & the yoke is fixed & no mistake. Of course I have abundance of instances at my finger ends & dont fail to point to all the silly married people I can remember

as proof of how easy it is to get noosed. This is a digression but perhaps it will come in seasonably if r Kennedy's spouse is hard upon you - you can however defend yourself well enough - I defended you as well as I was able one evening in D^r Phillip's house when Mrs W. Phillip stated that she thought you could not get a wife. She is a nice girl I liked her much better than him. He is at present engaged in surveying several of the stations. I was at Hankey with him. The neighbouring farmers have encroached on the lands of many of our stations. To set them right is the object he has in view. After that he intends coming up to the country to Gugua Town perhaps farther. We may have a visit of him [...] Kuruman. I should like [...] no doubt but he, weighs, [...] & I would manage Moffat in the event of his being entirely spoiled by the people in England - If he is not spoiled it will be a great wonder - What do you say to my going up to Abbyssin-ia? This is talked of by many of the missionaries as a desirable object, & some propose doing it. [Would it not promote our cause by making known to the Churches the awfully degraded state of our immense population? Look at the map published by the Society for the diffusion of U.K. you see far beyond us "very populous country " &c. I think one may be quite safe if above & without anything to excite the cupidity of the natives. I should cost the Society of nothing during those years I should be away. It might be 6 or 7 years before I should return, but if the languages are dialects of the Bechuana I could soon make known a little of the blessed plan of mercy to the different tribes on the way & if I should never return perhaps my life will be as profitably spent as a forerunner as in any other way - I thank God I have no desire to accumulate money. Whatever way my life can be spent best to promote the glory of our gracious God I feel desirous to adopt it. I shall wait anxiously for your opinion & advice - To you alone have I disclosed it I should like from you frequently as I have confidence in your Judgment more than in that of many others. Of course our communications will be only to ourselves

I have [...] at, Griqua Town & certainly he is the openlist[...] of strength [...] & no miracle to account for it!!

[0004]

Let us write frequently. I shall write again two months after arriving at Kuruman Will you write on receipt of this & again 2 or 3 months after? We have communications with the colony every 3 months & a talk is amongst us of establishing a post to go down to Colesburg once a month & bring letters, parcels &c. Address me. Care of D^r Phillip Church Square Cape Town - "Bechuana Country" is quite specific enough for finding my residence or you might say Kuruman as the post will most probably be from thence to Colesberg. I shall give you more certain information when I write next- At present I am ignorant myself I must take this to K & send it back again with my people who return to Bethelsdor the Captⁿ of our vessel was very obliging to me & gave me all this information respecting the use of this quadrant in his power, frequently sitting up till 12 o'clock at night for the purpose of taking lunar observations with me. He associated with none but myself & D^r Grant- He soon got disgusted with all the others none of them behaved like gentlemen. You will understand my feelings not of the most agreeable nature if you imagine me cooped up with another D^rToguide. The Captⁿ is a well informed shrewd Scotchman but no Christian. He rigged out the church on Sunday's & we had service but I being a poor preacher & M^r R. addressing them as Christians in

regular cold presbyterian style no moral influence was exerted & even had there been on Sabbath, it would have been neutralized by the week day conduct. In fact no good was done, I felt quite alone. Although the Captⁿ courted my company I could not enjoy his as if he had been a Christian. I hope M^r & M^{rs} R. combined will make themselves of some use to the Bechuanas, they appear anxious for it. I hope they will for both I believe are really pious. Had he been to Ongas I should not be at present circumstanced as I am I have met with very few indeed since I saw you intercourse with whom would tend much to promote spirituality of mind, I feel this painfully but at the same time am convinced this position I now occupy is intended by Him who orders our footsteps to make me more & more dependant on Himself & independant of every one else. I am reading "Baron's Mental Philosophy" carefully & find it very useful in give me more defined ideas with respect to what emotions are or are not sinful. How much need have we to watch our hearts these bitter fountains which nothing but Almighty grace can cleanse & purify. Do remember me in your prayers. I wont & have yet been unmindful of you I may mention here as I forgot to do when speaking of the Bechuana language the Gallas of Abbysinia whom Bruce & Salt mention are imagined by some here to be the parent stock of the Bechuanas I do not restrict you to two letters. As many as convenient. I shall do the same Yours very affectionately D.L.

I wont yet attempt writing papers for the Map. Not untill I have paid some attention to composition will I write more to the Directors even thou necessity compells me. Give my kind regards to I. Kernerd if he remembers me, I was with him in London in M^{rs} Sewells

Per Ship
Care of Rev^d D^r Phillip, Church square
Cape Town
Rev^dDavid G. Watt
Benares
single sheetEast Indies
Recd from Cape
Via Calcutta