

Letter to Catherine McRobert, 24 June 1843

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

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Kuruman 24 June 1843
My Dear Sister in Christ

Your kind & excellent letter I found a few days ago on my return from another visit to the Interior, and I assure you the perusal of it had gladdened my heart, indeed it is so "white" I don't know how to thank you enough for your kindness. You request that I write you a long one in return. How can I avoid it? If I only told you all my heart would say by way of acknowledgement this sheet would be too little. I really do thank you from the bottom of my heart and I bless Him who has put it into you to feel so much for the degraded & perishing & which to the other friends who have contributed I beg you will tender my warmest thanks. This I believe you will do cheerfully But what will you say if, assuming much more than your [^] [measure of] "old acquaintanceship freedom", I request you to begin & beg from them again. You must canvass them all over again. They have furnished one item The more valuable contribution you have yet to secure I want you to make them feel that the teacher I have now secured for them is their agent & not mine. They must feel a personal interest in him as their missionary to the heathen. They kindly resolve to help to support him O how I shall rejoice if they assure me they are determined to bear him on their hearts. I think if their prayers were concentrated on their own agent He would be much more successful. I believe our prayers are often unanswered on account of a want of "specification" We deal too much in generalisations our petitions want that focusing which they have when we have a specific object in view. Do we not feel more earnest when we have one only suit to urge "one thing" to desire of the Lord - than when we have many? I think we do, & therefore I am anxious that the dear friends should feel something like being personally connected with him. If you & they take the same view of the subject you must use me as your servant, I shall gladly instruct & guide him & do anything else you wish. If you

take a different view from mine & think I am wrong
you must tell me. If you wish to make any suggestions

I shall write M^r McRobert and give him some account of the state of the country & our prospects
of any extension of the gospel therein
I shall write again in the course of a few months

In the meantime believe me affectionately yours in the bonds of the gospel

David Livingst

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respecting him, by all means, out with them, you must not think I am so dreadfully learned or wise as to be beyond listening to suggestions in these matters. Write with the greatest freedom Ask whatever questions you choose for I assure you we who are situated in this outlandish quarter, never feel "touchy" with people who speak out their minds. What some people at home call "clerical dignity" we never think of, indeed I believe if it were suspected here we should call it "nonsense"

I shall take an early opportunity to give you a full account of your representative. He is a deacon in the church here & one of the most sensible consistent converts belonging to the Mission, the elder missionaries who are best able to judge say He & his sister have more principle than any other in the church, and they have been uniformly consistent in their walk ever since their conversion. As to general information He is at least equal to the best informed of his nation. He always attends the school although he is the father of two children But I should mislead you if I made you think his knowledge ~~was~~ is extensive. No, the Bechuanas have not yet had the means of acquiring much knowledge. He however knows the way of life & can preach to the point & with as much affection as any Betchuana I ever heard I shall give you more information respecting him as soon as I see how it goes with M^r Edwards & myself in our projected mission into the Interior

You may see by the inclosed that I cheerfully comply with your suggestion respecting the girls in Miss Smiths school The impression on my mind is that they are little girls But they may be great grown creatures and take offence at the plainness of my style. Please do read it over & if it is not the exact thing apologize for me. I thank them for their kind intentions towards our mission. What would be most useful is I fear different from what they have wished to send Nails of different sizes, hinges locks &c. would be of more value than anything else. We intend to commence

[...] [a new] station very near to the place where M^r Campbell faced about to go home & ~~also~~ not far also from the site of the town of the notorious Mosilikatze, and as we must commence first by building houses, the above named articles would be particularly serviceable, knives, scissors, beads

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buttons, hankerchiefs, medicines are also valuable But specimens of needlework although that which I suppose they are most anxious to send I must say are the least useful to the mission. I should regret if friends should send me articles of clothing to be distributed gratuitously. It does the natives harm when they receive such things without feeling they have earned them. If strong articles of that ~~description~~ [nature] were sent with the power of giving them as wages for labour, or rewards, I should be thankful & it is probable they would help to elevate the people But indiscriminate distribution ~~distribution~~ although only among church members creates endless heartburnings, the rich are offended if they dont get as much if not more than the poor They cant understand why a difference should be made since they are presents from the Christians in England, they never feel in any [way] grateful thus for these presents, & they dont value them half so much as if they [^] [had] earned them. Indeed the chief object for which these boxes of clothes are sent, viz. to increase our influence among them & thus lead them to the Saviour, is never accomplished. Nay more than this, I believe from all I have witnessed they are positively injurious to the cause. According to the instructions of our kind friends we have distributed their presents chiefly among the members of our churches. We have tried to be as impartial as possible, But notwithstanding all this the majority of them believe we have pursued a system of favouritism & this is anything but favourable to our success among them. Frequently have I heard missionaries wish that they never had had anything to do with these cases of wearing apparel But somebody [...] takes the liberty to tell the dear friends who send them, [...] say they are altogether useless, they would however be [...] useful if we had absolute power over them; suppo[...] the power to ask for them too the expenses of carriage with [...] believe would do away with much of the evil these things [...] produce. I think I hear you say, well, who would [...] suppose the missionaries had used such freedom [...] presents; nobody I concieve in England, But unless [...] speak positively. Interested traders & others ~~after~~ [would] circul[...] reports among the natives as [should] counterbalance all the [...] from another line of policy. If the little girls should wish to send your native teacher a present of their handywork I think a gown for his wife who in size is not unlike M^{rs} Kirk would have a good effect on both their minds. Colour is nothing to them. It may have as many as the coat of Joseph & each would be a recommendation to it, if it were only strong Strength is everything while colour, size &c are nothing in comparison And old black coat for him if strong would be considered invaluable & sent specifically for him would not create any of

the unpleasantness above referred to. His name is Mabaloe David Moleha[...]- [ne]. But he passes more frequently by his former name Mabalwe (the second a sounding like a in father) I shall give him some plain instructions in medicine in order to make

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a match for the rain making doctors of this country. Everything here is attributed to witchcraft indeed they believe no one would ever die if he were not bewitched and then the treatment of their doctors is always to destroy the effects of witchcraft. A few days ago I was present at a case of this kind. The chief of the Batlaro was [^] [last year] dangerously ill & sent a pressing message for my assistance I went and was successful in affording him aid. Ever since he has had unbounded confidence in our medicines. His father who still lives is one of the greatest doctors in the country was much offended with him for his change of opinion & hinted that I had done more than attempt the cure of the body. "He has [^] [said he] put some medicine into your heart to change it so You must not send for him again." The chief wife of the son became sick when I was away in the Interior. The son longed for my arrival but the father tried by all his art & incantations to cure without the aid of the "foreigner" & despairing of success he sent to another native doctor to assist him. The two combined were busy extracting all manner of things from different parts of her body when I arrived from the Interior. Bits of Rhinoceros hide, bones, &c &c, were exhibited after they had sucked some time at small incisions made on the surface & of course all believed that these were the causes of the pain, & had been put into her by some witch. But she got no better. My professional brethren were nothing daunted but maintained that there must still be some of these things remaining within. As the natives consider me as great a witch as any of them I ventured to give my advice in the matter & recommended the doctors to take an emetic before they commenced sucking again lest they should have been deceiving themselves, the things coming out of their own bodies instead of out of that of the patient. They did not wish this, nor yet that of my examining their mouths But one of them stole away unperceived by me & his servant ~~bled her~~ cupped her of them artfully separating the fibrine from other red particles exhibited it in triumph as a proof that he could make [...]

I immediately drew a little blood from the arm of a person standing by, separated the fibrins by means of a little [^] [warm] water & satisfied the whole party that this was really a constituent of the blood,- nothing else. The doctor found an excuse - much wiser of the day to leave [...] to another village, all this knowledge [^] [of this] will I hope assist [...] Mabalwe in his work

Care of Rev^d Dr Phillip Cape Town

5 letters

1843

Rev^d John M^cRobert

Cambuslang

near Glasgow

For M^{rs} M^cRobert