

Letter to Arthur Tidman, 24 September 1853

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org), 2017

[0001]

Town of Sekeletu, Linyanti, 24th September 1853

The Reverend Doctor Tidman

My Dear Sir

When the obstacles which caused our detention at Kuruman were removed we passed quickly towards the country of Sebituane until within one degree of Latitude from this town. All the people were then suddenly laid prostrate by fever, except one lad and myself. This caused a further loss of time but through the goodness of God, all recovered. On reaching this, the Southern capital of the Makololo we were received with all the demonstrations of welcome which they are accustomed to bestow on their chiefs. The idea seemed universal that with a missionary some great indefinite good had arrived. Many expected to be elevated at once to a condition equal to that of the Bakwains and inhabitants of Kuruman, of which they had received very exaggerated accounts; others imagined that they would very soon be transformed into civilized men, possessing the clothing, horses, arms, waggons, &c. of Europeans, "Jesus had not loved their forefathers, hence their present degradation. He had loved the white men, and given them all the wonderful things they now possess. And as I had come to teach them to pray to Jesus, and to pray for them, their means would soon be all supplied." A very great deal was expected too from medicines and my liberality in giving things I have not in my possession. Patient industry, and perseverance in learning were never thought of. The chief not yet nineteen years of age, frequently pressed me to name something I wished, so that he might by presenting it shew his affection, and I suspected, induce me forthwith to commence the work of metamorphosis by means of enchantments. But when I steadily refused to mention any object I desired more than to secure their temporal and spiritual welfare by means of the gospel, he seemed to test my sincerity by presenting 4 small and 8 large elephant's tusks. I had not an opportunity of refusing them, as they were brought and laid down by ~~my~~ the waggon during my absence. And then the chief came and begged me so earnestly to accept them I felt at a loss how to act. In other circumstances, I should have felt no hesitation in appropriating them to defray expenses incurred entirely on account of this people. But as it was, though I had no direct evidence that the chief's object was such as I have described, the mere suspicion led me when departing for the Barotse country, to request him to leave orders that if any traders came my wory must be used as well as his own. By

this means no offence was given which might have been the case had I at once sent them back. Some months were spent here. for though I soon proposed to examine the country in order to discover a suitable locality for a mission, Sekeletu objected first that he had not yet had a satisfactory look at me. He must see me longer. Then he could not think of allowing me to go alone

[0002]

alone. He must accompany me and see that no evil befel me. This required considerable preparation, during which I offered to teach the people to read Long and profound were the deliberations over this. They are never in a hurry in Africa, and reading seems so supernatural; it cannot be explained to those who know nothing of letters. At last the chief told me that he was "afraid that learning to read might change his heart, and make him content with one wife only, as in the case of Sechele" It was in vain to urge that the altered state of mind contemplated would be as voluntary as the present. – So underhand means would be employed to convert, all the means employed being open teaching. – There is no compulsion The truth is taught respecting God's will and the belief or unbelief of the instructed is left as an affair between their judge and themselves. It was just as I have felt in my early years in contemplating that everlasting preaching praying & singing prolonged into Heaven. Quite failing to realize the altered state of mind which produces a relish for such service it seemed as if celestial joys might be endured, rather than be consigned to the other quarter. As I was then subjected to repeated attacks of the Fever, I did not press the subject long. But when we returned from the Barotse, an experiment of which I have reason to be satisfied was set on foot. Sekeletu's Father in law and step-father were appointed to learn to read in order that their experience may serve as a beacon to others. Though the plan exhibits the extreme of African caution, they applied themselves so rigorously they and several others mastered the Alphabet perfectly in one day. But teaching to read being less my object in this journey than preaching the gospel of peace while endeavoring to discover a salubrious locality for a mission, I shall proceed to relate our visit to the Barotse country.

Two sketches are enclosed, one long and large or just as I put it down as we went along. The other small - reduced to the Latitudes & Longitudes according to observations taken as opportunities occurred. The large is sent in order that you may see several remarks, which my pen is not fine enough to insert in the reduced scale. and in order that if necessary a more correct reduction may be made. We embarked on the river called everywhere Leeambye at the village of Sekhosi. our fleet consisting of 33 canoes and our company of about 160 men. From the bend at Katrina-molelo up to the commencement of the Barotse valley, the country is covered by forest and Tsetse. The country otherwise seemed well adapted for a residence. Many villages of Banyeti, a poor but industrious people are situated on both banks. They are expert as hunters

of hippopotami & other animals. They cultivate grain too extensively At the bend above named commences the rocky bottom which forms cataracts and rapids all the way up to the Barotse. The river is of very great beauty and breadth. In the Southern confines of Latitude 16° the high banks open to leave the river and stretch away to the N.N.E. and N.N.W. untill between twenty and thirty miles apart. The intervening space is ~~the~~ the Barotse country and is annually inundated as lower

[0003]

Egypt is by the Nile. The valley is covered with coarse succulent grasses which are the pasturage of large herds of cattle during a portion of the year. There are many villages of Makololo in the valley. I have not put down all that I visited and many were seen in the distance. But there are no large towns. The reasons are the mounds on which alone towns and villages are built are all small. And the people require to be separate on account of being rich in cattle. Nariete does not contain 1000 inhabitants. The ridges are thickly strewed with villages. The people Banyeti and Barotse are not rich in cattle but they require to live apart on account of cultivating large gardens of sugar cane sweet potato, manioc, yams. millet maize &c &c. The exhalations which arise from a valley 20 miles broad and about 100 long produce Fever which is very fatal even among natives. It prevails most virulently when the waters of inundation are retiring. We went North till we came to the junction of the Leeba or Londa with the main stream Leeambye in 14° 11' south Lat. and found the country presenting the same characteristics as I have described. On returning towards Nariete I went to the Eastern ridge in order to examine that and see the establishment of a Merchant from the farthest inland station of the Portuguese, opposite Benguela. A stockade had been erected, and a flagstaff for the Portuguese banner planted. The houses of the merchant and some bastards were in the West African style. The owner whom I had previously seen at Linyanti was absent but his ^ servants did their utmost to shew me kindness. When my boatmen prepared my bed outside, They insisted on my occupying their master's couch, and I never felt so grateful in my life for a warm shelter for I was in the cold stage of one of the intermittents which continue to plague me after the Fever. I thought of going Westward in company with this merchant but the sight of gangs of poor wretches in chains at the stockade moved me resolve to proceed alone. I have not, I am sorry to confess, discovered a healthy locality. The whole of the country of Sebituane is unhealthy. The current of the river is rapid as far as we went, and shewed we must have been on an elevated table land. Yet the inundations cause the fever to prevail very extensively. I am at a loss what to do, But will not give up the case as hopeless. Shame upon us if we are to be outdone by slave traders. I met Arabs from Zaquebar, subjects of the Imanin of Muscat who had been quite accross the continent. They wrote Arabic readily in my note book and boldly avowed that Mahomet was the greatest

of all the prophets. In pursuance of a nobler object than theirs I have determined to try and fulfil the second part of my enterprise viz. open up a way to the coast. I give the West the preference because it is nearer. If my calculations are right, the Longitudes of the map of last year are all wrong. The waggon stand for instance instead of being in 26° is $23^{\circ} 48'$ or $50'$. I have repeated the calculations of Lunar distances again and again and always with the same result But I do not wish this error published until I hear from the Astronomer at the Cape to whom I have submitted the

[0004]

observations and also some occultations by which to test them. But for the destruction of my celestial map by the Boers I might have determined the Longitudes by occultations alone, they being much more to be depended on than the common method of Lunar distances. If then I am right we are nearer the west than the East coast. Nariela is on 23° East and the confluence of the Leeba or Londa not much more. I have not had time to work out the Longitude of that point but the river $\hat{}$ (Leeba) comes from the capital of a powerful state whose chief is reported to be friendly to foreigners. If I am permitted to return by this chieftain it will be water carriage for perhaps ^{ds} of the way. And should a mission be established there in time it will be all the better - I intend to try for Loanda because though farther many English live there. I go on horseback. Waggon travelling being reported impossible on account of forests and numerous rivers. The Portuguese are carried up in hammocks hung on poles. Two slaves carry a man It does not look well. The Portuguese maps are all constructed from native reports, so no dependance can be placed on them. Many tribes inhabit the country all more or less accustomed to the visits of strangers. The greatest difficulty I apprehend is that of making our objects understood. Their languages bear a close affinity to the Barotse dialect but this I was compelled to give up reducing.

I never had a touch of the Fever till my employment became sedentary here. I have had eight attacks since The last when going North of Nariela was very severe, being accompanied with large loss of florid blood. It thinned me much. But on no occasion did I laylie by. Fits of vertigo probably from exhaustion troubled me for some time. Everything seemed to rush to the left and I had to lay hold on something to prevent a fall. These induced me to give up collecting Barotse words and other materials for a dictionary. Though still thin the intermittents have left, and I am only waiting for the rain to commence to start for the West. They begin next month It will be seen that M^{rs} L. had better not come to the Cape to meet me at the time appointed. If I reach Loanda in February

I must return with the people again and will be here instead of at the Cape. The time unavoidably lost by Boers and Fever renders a little extension of my furlough necessary. Then if the Directors sanction a permanent station or any other form of labour for this miserable Interior, some other mode of travelling in from the west must be arranged. A few kind words to Mrs L. from you, will I think make her willing to prolong her stay in Scotland. Although the prospect seems dark for the Interior it may not be quite so gloomy as I have drawn it. The natives describe the mortality as very great and that attacks of fever are excessively frequent & severe. I have given you their ideas. But my own except at times are not so sombre. I tried native remedies in some of the attacks to which I was subjected in order to discover if they had any valuable means of cure but After being stewed in vapour baths, and smoked ~~in~~ over fires of green plants in hot potsherds &c & I find that our own medicines are much more efficacious and safer. I have not lost

[0005]

a single patient by fever. And if I had been able [to] regulate my diet I should not have been subjected to so many attacks. As it was we were frequently compelled to eat on the principle of laying in a stock for the next day. My own people being too weak to go with me and the Makololo cook only in the evenings when travelling. Then if I left the canoe in order to visit a village there are ~~so~~ so many branches of the river intersecting the valley everywhere I was always wet up to the middle. I fear to give you either a too encourag[-]ing or discouraging report. I am afraid to incur the responsibility of inducing you to regard the case as hopeless. The American missionaries report the Gaboan station as not warranting the long established belief that Europeans could not live there. And my firm conviction is that even the Interior of Africa merits a fair trial. Such with the help of God and your sanction I am determined to give it.)

The slave trade was prohibited here, and a large party of Mambari who were here endeavoring in vain to renew it, fled precipitately as soon as they heard that I had crossed the Chobe. The Makololo remonstrated with them but they asserted that I would take all their goods from them because they dealt in slaves. A Portuguese came from the West but he finding no market remained only three days and returned. It was different in the Barotse or Northern division of the country. Another Portuguese merchant came thither and by means of an underchief who had some pretensions to the chieftainship obtained free access to all the Banyeti, Batoka and Bashukulorupo villages East of the Leeambye. There the stockade which gave great offence to the

Makololo was erected without the knowledge or permission of the chief. They would have commenced hostilities at once in order to drive the whole slavetrading party out of the country but a variety of considerations induced me to intercede for them and by that intercession they will be allowed to depart in peace. Probably deceived by the assurances of the disaffected underchief they seem to have had no idea of the risk they were running. But when the conspirator came down with the intention of cutting off Sekeletu, He was instantly seized and killed. His fathers and several others were cut off in the most cold blooded manner. And when I remon[-] stated against the shedding of human blood, the counsellors quietly remarked, "You see we are still Boers, we are not yet taught" But for this unfortunate affair no trading in slaves would have been allowed. In this they have the precedent of the former chief of the Barotse who refused to grant the Mambari permission to visit his country as slave traders

[0006]

A cannon of small calibre was found in the possession underchief mentioned

The country in the direction of Mosioatunya has high mountains and the Batoka country is a high table land without trees except along the rivers. Healthy spots might be found in both of these but in neither did I feel it duty to travel because the vicinity of Mosilikatse renders it impossible for Makololo or any other tribe to reside there. A change may yet be effected among the Matibele which would change the present aspect of affairs

Believe me Dear Sir
Yours Affectionately
David Livingston