

Letter to Arthur Tidman, 9 June 1844

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org), 2017

[0001]

Mabotsa 9 June 1844

Dear Sir

The Lord having in tender mercy restored me to my wanted health. I have much cause for gratitude in being able again to communicate with you. The affliction from which I have been raised was both painful and protracted. As the wounds discharging profusely prevented the union of the fragments into which the bone was broken and these having seldom been properly secured every motion of the body produced a grating irritation which reacted on the wounds. But through the mercy of our Heavenly Father the whole has healed well beyond my most sanguine expectation, and the bone is perfectly straight and firm. It was a severe trial of patience to be laid aside so long and at a period too when every assistance that can be rendered is required. But though I fear I have not learned all that was intended by the chastisement, I trust I have realized much which though I knew I did not fully feel before. And I hope I am now more anxious than ever that my spared life may be entirely consecrated to the glory of my great Deliverer.

The Bakhatla are at present busily engaged in removing from their former location to the spot on which we reside, and it is cheering [^] to observe [^] that the subordinate chiefs have with one exception chosen sites for their villages conveniently near to that on which we ~~purpose~~ propose to erect the permanent premises. We purpose to build a house to serve as school and meeting house as soon as possible and then we hope our efforts to impart a knowledge of saving truth will assume a more regular form than at present. [Among a people as degraded as Bechuanas, no very decided result can be expected unless there is a continuous application of the truth to their minds, and for this mission[-]aries in Africa have superior advantages to those in countries more densely populated. There the mass of the population

[0002]

cannot be addressed very frequently or the address followed by continued and pointed appeals to the same individuals. While

here we generally have opportunities of directing the high on to the same minds continuously. And it appears by the Divine blessing to ensure greater ~~results~~ efforts than desultory efforts between which considerable periods intervene. Conversion among Bechuanas is in general by no means a quick process. Their depravity being subnatural, some time elapses ere they are raised to the level of sinners in other countries and then they seem to require time again before they can accommodate their minds to the change of thought and motive. There may be a leaning to the side of holiness for a long period but generally a thorough revolution is wrought out before their convictions become embodied in action. [I visited the Bakhatla frequently before the establishment of the mission But it was not until my fifth visit that sufficient confidence was inspired to draw forth a cordial invitation for me to settle among them. And this is the only good I can ascertain effected by my itineraries to them. The reason seems to have been ^ that too long periods intervened between each journey to produce any lasting impression. And this is not to be wondered at, for nothing can exceed the grovelling earthliness of their minds. They seem to have fallen as low in the scale of humanity as human nature can. At some remote period their ancestors appear to have been addicted to animal worship for each tribe is called by some animal. By it they swear and in general neither kill nor eat it, alledging as a cause that these animals are the friends of their tribe. Thus the ^ word Batlapi" literally translated is "They (of the) Fish Bakwain "They (of the) Crocodile". Bakhatla, "They (of the) monkey" &c [But if the conjecture is not wrong they have degenerated from even that impure form of worship and the wisest among them have now no knowledge of it but suppose some of their ancestors must have been called by these names. They have reached the extreme of degradation. When we compare the Bakhatla with the inhabit[-]ants around Lattakoo, the latter appear quite civilized, and their present state of partial enlightenment shows that the introduction of the gospel into a country has a mighty influence

[0003]

even over those by whom it is either not known or rejected. I am not now to be understood as speaking of the converts nor of the new phases of character the transforming power of the gospel has developed among them. But I allude to the unconnected and to those other than saving influences of Christianity which so materially modify the social system at home. On many these influences have operated for years and they have not operated in vain. Hence the mass of the population in the Kuruman district are not now in that state the Gospel found them, and in which the poor Bakhatla now are. There the existence of Deity is tacitly admitted by nearly all. ^ those who form The exceptions ^ to this rule denying it rather on account of

attachment to their lusts, than in sober seriousness. [And I believe the number is but small who have not the idea floating on their minds, that this life is but the beginning of our existence and death but one event in a life which is everlasting. But the Bakhatla have had no thoughts on the subject. Their mind is darkness itself, and no influences have ever operated on it but those which have left it supremely selfish. it is only now that Christians have begun to endeavour to stop the stream which has swept [^] them generation after generation ~~of them~~ into darkness. And I may [...]

Holy Spirit aid our ~~efforts~~ endeavours. For without this mighty power all human efforts will be but labour in vain. That power exerted over Bechuanas - raising them from the extreme of degradation- and transforming them into worshippers of the Living God constitutes the wonder and the cause for gratitude in the Bechuana mission]

Our native assistant Mebaloe has been of considerable value to the mission. In endeavouring to save my life he nearly lost his own for he was caught and wounded severely. But both before our being laid aside and since recovery he has shown great willingness to be useful. The cheerful manner in which he engages with us in manual labour on the station. And his affectionate addresses to his countrymen are truly gratifying. M^F Edwards took him to several villages near the Kurrechane lately in order to introduce him to his work and I intend to depart tomorrow for the same purpose in several villages of [^] the Makone, situated N.E. of this. In all there may be a dozen considerable villages situated at convenient distances around us and we each purpose to visit them stately

[0004]

it would be of immense advantage to the cause had we many such agents. But after being assured by bretheren on the spot whom I presumed to be intimately acquainted with the state of the mission. that many such could be got: but after most earnest pleading for and recieving assurances of support from my friends at home. I am sorry to say I cannot succeed according to my desire. Suitable individuals are generally so wedged and dovetailed among their relatives, I fear some time must yet elapse ere that means of spreading the gospel can be extensively brought into operation. Still, believing that it is extremely well adapted to the state of this country. And having seen that it has been extensively blessed for the conversion of souls I shall never lose sight of it. And constantly pray that God may incline the hearts of his converts to feel more compassion for their countrymen Believe me

Dear Sir

Yours Affectionately

David Livingston

Mabotsa June 9, 1844
David Livingston,

Care of Rev^d D^r Phillip Cape Town

The Rev^d Arthur Tidman
Mission House
Blomfield St.
London

single

Received Oct 9, 1844