

Letter to Charles H. Darling, 29 September 1852

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1852

The Lieut. Governor Darling.

May it please your Honor.

In reference to the treaty entered into by Her Majesty's Commissioners with Emigrant Boers on the 16th of January last, I have the honour to inform the Government that the provision therein made for the free accep of Brittish travellers to the Lake and countries beyond have lately been violated by a Commando of the above named Boers. It was accompanied by some hundreds of natives, but the Commando was composed of six hundred mounted Boers, and as I know from repeated inspection of the entire district of Magaliesberg that the Emigrant population is under four thousand souls, the violation of treaty, to which in the following particulars I respectfully call the attention of your Honor, is not the act of a small and unauthorized portion of the Community, but that of the body whose independence the treaty of the 16th January was meant to recognize.

The above mentioned Commando made its appearance in the Bakwanian Country on the 27th Ult. A party with four waggons was detached from the main body, in order to plunder any house which is situated eight miles north from the town of Secheli. They destroyed books, medicines and surgical instruments worth upwards of £150 - and carried off or destroyed furniture and other property of more than £185. value making my personal losses amount to £335.

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They also took away or destroyed the stores and cattle of some respectable English travellers, viz. Messrs Webb, Codrington Green & c & c. who are now exploring the Country of Sebitoane; the distance from the Colony to that country renders relays of cattle absolutely necessary. It has therefore, become customary for travellers to leave a portion of their stores at my house and half of their Cattle in charge of Secheli the Chief of the Bakwaians. Both goods and cattle have always been held sacred by the inhabitants of the country; and when the town was removed eight miles from the house they of their own accord placed a guard on the spot, and every article remained in as much security during my absence for the last two years, as when present in the house.

Guides have always been frankly furnished by Engl~~Secheli~~ to English travellers, and except in the case of M^r Moyle who did not return the people given by the Chief to take him to the Colony, no unpleasantness has ever occurred.

With the plundering of my house was associated the destruction of the town of Secheli, and considerable property deposited there by M^r Macabe. The Boers were allowed to form their Camp unmolested before the town. Some of them even attended divine Service held in the Middle of it on Sunday 29th; and they informed Secheli, that they had come to fight because the Queen had given over the country and people to them and they would ~~accomplish~~ abolish Chieftainship.

Considerable stress was [^] [also] laid on the refusal of Secheli to obey their orders to prevent Englishmen from going to the Lake Country. (That these orders have been given, I can testify having seen the documents sent by the Boers containing them.)

On Monday the 30th the Boers commenced their attack by means of swivels, which soon set the town on fire.

The smoke and heat caused much confusion, many of the women running away were captured and shot. The men held their position on a small conical hill in the center of the town during the whole day, and there being no water near, both Boers and Natives retired when it became dark.

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The numbers of natives killed is upward of sixty; of the Boers thirty five; several of both parties have since died of their wounds, but these are not reckoned in the above numbers. The shooting of women was probably accidental, but not so the capture of children; they reduce them to a state of slavery. I have seen numerous instances of this in cases of children taken from other tribes; and have ascertained the facts from the children themselves in their own language. Among those captured from the Bakwaians are a former wife and two children of Secheli. In the division of Spoil the Mother and children were given to different Boers. The possession of horses enabled the Commando to carry off the cattle belonging to the English travellers before the Bakwaians could secure them by flight. Those of two Native Teachers and my own on which I trusted for assistance in my Northern Journey shared the same fate. Three [Three] cattle stations belonging to Secheli were also robbed, and the Bakhatla and Bangwaketse lost all their cattle. The corn in the country is entirely consumed and the people have only stealing or starvation in prospect. There is a probability of a struggle altogether different from any which has yet taken place in the Interior. I have made careful inquiries among eight different tribes who have been attacked by the Boers during the last ten years, and also among the Boers themselves; But never could discover the loss of a single man on the side of the latter. In only one instance was a wound inflicted. The above mentioned engagements is therefore peculiar

and from the known determination of Secheli's character evinced in the late skirmish, even after two bullets had pierced his hat and a third his coat sleeve; makes me fear that the work of retaliation for a most wanton and unprovoked attack will be carried on with vigour. The loss of thirty five men will be peculiarly galling to the Boers, inasmuch as while professing to wish to prevent the trade in guns and gunpowder by Englishmen

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They are fully aware that much of this slaughter has been inflicted by weapons which members of their own community have sold. It is highly probable that those parties of Boers who have gone to the Lake in order to trade in arms and ammunition will be cut off on their return. Secheli has warned the English travellers to keep apart from them, and I believe they are quite safe, as the difference between Boers and Englishmen is recognized throughout the Interior.

The above facts showing that a [^] [the first] blow has been ~~and~~ struck by the Boers, and that too on a tribe which has never given them the smallest provocation, not for the last eight years at least, the slightest trouble to any of its neighbours are I conceive worthy, of the observation of the government; for if the policy of the Boers takes its usual course; the natives become exasperated and reckless; gradually learn to fight well, and then when the Boers perceive their real danger they back out on such contemptible pleas as that of not being paid by the English government.

I have the honour to be
your Honor's
obedient Servant.
(Signed)David Livingstone.