

Letter to Arthur Tidman, 24 June 1843

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Kuruman 24th June 1843

Rev^d A. Tidman

Dear Sir

Your kind and encouraging letter

I found a few days ago on returning from another tour in the Interior, and I now beg leave gratefully to acknowledge the encouragement it imparted to my mind. It afforded me unfeigned pleasure to be informed that the measures I felt it my duty to adopt had met the approbation of the Directors. Their satisfaction in my labours I hope at all times to feel anxious to secure. And I earnestly pray the Great Head of the church may condescend so to guide my operations, as that all may be for His glory. If that prayer is answered I have no doubt but that I shall obtain not only the testimony of my own conscience but also the approbation of all His eminent servants.

In reference to two topics adverted to in yours viz. Native agency and the appointment of a District Committee it will be gratifying for you to be informed that having written some of my Christian friends in Scotland in behalf of the former I have recieved some very encouraging promises of support One has already remitted the sum of £12 to the Society, and others promise to make an effort to raise other two such sums as soon as the then depressed state of the country had been got over. But with respect to the latter measure I confess I entertain no very sanguine hopes of it being successful. I only know of two of the bretheren viz. M^{rs} Moffat & Ross at all desirous of its establishment. This and the fact that the others will join simply because such is the expressed will of the Directors, seem to augus ill for its prosperity. For my own part although a warm admirer of the principles on which the congregational unions of England and Scotland are formed my short experience among missionaries makes me not quite so sure of the propriety of missionary unions. the salutary influence of enlightened public opinion which these possess is here entirely awaiting and without it I believe we may

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in our corporate capacity do what as individuals no one of us should ever dare. I however endeavour to repress my private feelings on the subject And I do so with the hope that the measure may be productive of all the advantage to the cause which a well conducted combination is calculated to effect. But the Directors will not I trust consider me guilty of any impropriety if when yielding a prompt compliance with their wish I feel constrained to add I must reserve to myself the power of withdrawing from that committee if at any future time I feel that to be my duty. If compelled to dissolve my connection with it I earnestly hope it may not be in consequence of having indulged a spirit inimical to brotherly union, but that it may be the result of a humble prayerful deliberation and with grief that the measure has failed to answer my expectations –

I shall now endeavour to give you some account of the manner in which I have been employed since the date of my last viz. 18 July / 42. And of the prospects still before us notwithstanding the commotions which soon after that period arose. No instructions had arrived from home and the esteemed bretheren Hamilton and Edwards having fully approved of my efforts to benifit the Bakwains I resolved immediatly to follow up these endeavours in another journey. But when all my arrangements had been completed the sad news were brought that Sebegwe the chief of the Bangwaketze had contrary to the advice I had tendered him last year from the Bakwain country, left the desert of the Bakalahari - that he had been attacked by the combined forces of Mahura and Sehutsane, and that very many of his people had been murdered. To add to our grief on the reception of these news we learned that several of the believers of this station had been with Sebegwe at the very time of attack, they being ignorant of the treachourous designs of their chief had just before assured Sebegwe that Mahura was his friend & ally. The consequence was, an impression was produced on the minds of both Bangwaketze & other Interior tribes that the believers had been the means made use of by Mahura for the

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betrayal of Sebegwe. Some incidents which happened during their visit tended very much to deepen that impression. The accidental firing of a musket on the night preceding the attack by one of the visiting party was construed as having been the signal by which they apprised Mahura of the exact situation of Sebegwe – The singing at family worhsip as their incantations for success And the collecting the people together for worship (it being sabbath morning when the attack was made) as only a pretext by which the believers

tried to aid the massacre. On being informed of these untoward events, I felt still more anxious to undertake the journey that by my presence and explanations I might endeavour to disabuse the minds of the Heathen of their prejudices. I feared if no effort for that purpose were made the prejudices against our people might become transferred to the gospel and thus another barrier be raised against us when we should be permitted to carry it to them. But after making every effort I found it impossible to procure people for the waggon. All the natives felt certain that Sebegwe revenge himself on the first party from this quarter that fell into his hands. I was therefore compelled to remain in this neighbourhood for several months afterwards. This I very much regretted, as the population here is very small indeed, the majority are professors of religion and the remainder being very few there is no scope for more than two missionaries at most. The greater portion of my time I employed in itineracy to the adjacent tribes. But when here I took part in the routine business of the station, preaching, working occasionally at the printing press, assisting at the erection of a small chapel got up by M^r Edwards & myself at one of the outstations, administering to the wants of the sick many of whom come great distances for aid, and other duties which though differing entirely from those of the minister at home all require to be cheerfully performed. To think of standing upon what some people at home call "clerical dignity" in the sense they have of it, would be as much out of place in a missionary in Africa as his becoming Entomologist would be. - The work of God has been going on steadily here ever since we arrived, but I am not aware of its having received any visible impulse through our instrumentality. It must therefore be attributed under God entirely to the machinery previously set in motion by our honoured predecessors. If you could realize this fact

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as fully as those on the spot can, you would be able to enter into the feelings of inexpressible delight with which I hail the decision of the Directors that we go forward to the dark Interior. May the Lord enable me to consecrate my whole being to the glorious work.

Most of my period of suspense here was one of great commotion in the Interior. One tribe or another was attacked either by the Southern tribes or by the more to be dreaded Matibele. These wars & rumours of wars seemed to occupy the minds of those under the preaching of the gospel to the exclusion of everything else. This proved a great hindrance to the work of conversion. But by the month of February last the ferment had so far subsided I was at length able to find people to conduct the waggon

I left thus on 21st of February and after 12 days travelling arrived at the village where Sebegwe with the remains of

his tribe has taken up his residence. One of my men had been of the party which it was supposed had betrayed him. He entered the village along with me and when we arrived at the place where Sebegwe & his warriors were seated a most uproarious recognition of my servant followed. After which I having taken my seat close by Sebegwe, he turned to me and demanded why I had attacked and destroyed all his people. I replied by asking, why he had refused to listen to my advice and thus destroy himself. Did the messengers he had sent to me last year fail to deliver my message or did he discredit my words. Some of the messengers being still alive then recognized me and Sebegwe & I soon became very good friends. He urged in excuse for acting contrary to my advice that he was already on his march out of the Bakalihari country when his messengers returned. That he was most desirous again to eat corn. - That great numbers of his people had been cut off by a fever which prevails near the Lake Mokhorro - And that being entirely ignorant of the power of guns he despised the Batlapi as antagonists. The meaning of the comet which was then visible to us in all its splendour was his next enquiry. He, like all the tribes which I visited, thought that it was indicative of the approach of some dreadful calamity. Perhaps it was significant of the death of Mahura which he had been trying to bring about by means of witchcraft. Or it might be

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an intimation of another inroad of the Matibele as they had seen a comet just before their first invasion." I tried to convince him that there was no calamity permitted to befall man except by the will of God and that for some object of good to those who experienced it. But the mind of poor Sebegwe is on these subjects as dark as midnight. He however during the whole of our visit behaved in a most friendly way. It being Saturday when I arrived I explained the nature of the Sabbath and requested an opportunity to address his people. Next morning before daybreak I was much pleased to hear a herald proclaiming that by the orders of the chief "nothing should be done on that day but praying to God and listening to the words of the foriegner" He himself listened with great attention when I told them of "Jesus and the resurrection" and I was not unfrequently interrupted by him putting sensible questions on the subject. He told me that he once saw M^r Moffat but as M^r M. was young and did not know the language it is not remarkable that Sebegwe had forgotten all that had been said. May the Holy Spirit be poured down upon him for without his gracious influences nothing that we can do will penetrate the thick crest of ignorance which envelopes their benighted souls -

After remaining a few days with Sebegwe and partaking of

such hospitality as his reduced circumstances now enable him to bestow I passed on to the Bakhatla who live a few hours to the Northwest. Their situation is peculiarly well adapted for missionary operations, more so indeed than any I have seen in this country. There is as great a population collected in one spot as in any other point in the Interior and that population seems attached to the soil - There are abundant facilities for a more improved mode of agriculture even should that be adopted by a much more numerous population than at present exists. The manufactory of iron seems to have been carried on here uninterruptedly from a very remote period. The ore is found at the junction of the Trappean & sandstone rocks in the immediate vicinity of the villages, and is scarcely anywhere covered by any depth of soil. It was very near to this spot where M^r Campbell faced about to go home and very probably the iron founderies which he

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heard of but was not permitted to see are the very same as belong to them. They always refuse admittance to those who have had intercourse with the other sex since the period of the year when they annually commence smelting lest they should bewitch the iron. Which is probably the very same reason which prevented M^r Campbell a sight of them. Iron bewitched is when it is burned to a cinder from a too brisk use of the bellows. When the chief & principal families of the tribe fled along with Sebegwe on account of the inroads of the Matibele the magority of the tribe remained and carried on their works in iron as usual. The nature of the soil too is different from that at Kuruman and it is probable we should not be mortified as here by the frequent removals of the people on account of the deaths of their cattle. And as they are situated near several other tribes the difficulties of itineracy and superintendance of native agents among them would not be very formidable. I lately asked the chief of that tribe if he should like me to come and be his missionary He held up his hands & said "O I shall dance for joy if you do" I shall collect all my people to hoe for you a garden and you will get more sweet reed & corn than myself" No instructions on the subject of an Interior mission having then come to hand I could only say in answer to his enquiries, that I should inform my Christian friends in England of his desires for a missionary. I need scarcely add that his wish although sincere does not indicate any love to the doctrines we teach. It is merely a desire for the protection & temporal benefit which missionaries are everywhere supposed to bring. It is however as much as we can expect from the Heathen. If we have security for life & property

we trust the Lord will give us in his own time
all the rest our hearts long for.

The village of Sechele the chief of the Bakwain is five days beyond the Bakhatla. Last year he was exasperated with me for remaining a month with Bube another Bakwain chief whom Sechele considers as in rebellion against him. He made known to some of the believers of this station his determination to do me mischief should

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I ever attempt to pass his country again. But the Lord was my shield and Sechele was kinder than I ever saw him before His only child was sick when I arrived and the child of one of his principal men was reduced to a skeleton by dysentery. The means I employed were with the Divine blessing useful to both and Sechele did not seem able to speak a single angry word. We had much private conversation together in the course of which he told me all his objections to the gospel we preach. Several of his questions were striking. One was "since it is true that all who die unforgiven are lost forever, Why did your nation not come to tell us of it before now"? My ancestors are all gone & none of them knew anything of what you tell me. How is this? (I thought immediately of the guilt of the church but did not confess.) I told him multitudes in our own country were like himself so much in love with their sins my ancestors had spent a great deal of time in trying to persuade them And yet after all many of them by refusing were lost. We now wish to tell all the world about a saviour And if men did not believe the guilt would be entirely theirs. Sechele has been driven to another part of his country from that in which he was located last year. And so has Bube so the prospects I had last year of benefitting them by native teachers are for the present darkened. It is painful to see it But we must not be discouraged. If we only do our duty in an energetic hearty way the Most High will surely lift upon us the light of His countenance & bless us.

The Matibele of Mosilikatze during their last inroad upon the tribes in the Interior took many of the women prisoners. These are constantly making their escape & returning to their respective tribes. When still at the town of Sechele I saw a party of these fugitives which had just arrived. They had travelled nearly two months from the period of making their escape, collecting the roots of the desert for subsistence by day and climbing any high rock they saw in their way for protection by night. The hardships they had undergone reduced them almost to skeletons and

it was most affecting to listen to their tale of woe

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But on the part of their fellow countrymen the recital of their sufferings seemed ^ to excite not the smallest sympathy. They were "women only" and the men sat & listened with the greatest indifference Truly Heathenism has no bowels of compassion. The tale of these females although it had no effect on the Bakwains, had a powerful effect upon the people of my waggon. I could not prevail upon them to go an inch further for to go any nearer the Matibele than they were seemed like rushing into the jaws of death. Their very hearts seemed ready to die within them. I was thus reduced to the necessity of either giving up my tour & returning, or going forward on oxback. I chose the latter and although it has some inconveniences, it possesses some advantages over the waggon. I visited no fewer than four villages of the Bakalihari to which with the waggon I could not have come. And as they are much more attentive to our instructions than any other Bechuana tribe the pleasure of proclaiming the message of mercy to those who had never before seen a white face, far outweighed any fatigue incurred in reaching them. By far the happiest portion of my late journey was when sitting by their fires & listening to their traditionary tales I could intermingle the story of the cross with their conversation. They are a poor degraded enslaved people. The other tribes consider them as their inferiors - keep them constantly hunting for them and although they procure all the skins which the other tribes sew into Karosses they can scarcely keep as many as cover their own nakedness - their gardens are always situated far from their villages in order to secure the produce from the exactions of their masters. And they are always found far from water in order to get as few visits from the servants of the chiefs as possible. To us Europeans it is wonderful how they live. But though they are in want of much that we consider almost necessary to existence a kind Providence has supplied them with many substitutes, they have shewn me more than 40 different kinds of roots and above 30 kinds of fruits which the desert spontaneously yields them. And many of these are by no means unsavoury esculents, "Locusts and wild honey" abound to them. Perhaps I may be excused if I mention the physiological effects of the Baptist's food, the former is excessively constipating and the latter has quite the opposite tendency. The locusts pounded & mixed with honey are as good

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if not better than shrimps at home. It is not probable that he confined himself to that diet. If however "locusts and wild honey" were as plentiful in the wilderness of Judea as they are now in the desert of the Bakalihari he would have had very little difficulty in finding a constant supply. During a period of twelve months I saw no fewer than nineteen swarms of locusts and yet no particular damage was done to the crops of the natives in consequence; and had I myself attended all the calls of the "honey bird" I should never have been without a sufficiency of honey.

When at the Bamangwato I saw a son of Conrad Buys, a name both known and dreaded by the early missionaries. He is apparently about 30 years of age. - is dressed & speaks the language exactly as the native. He is one of their lowest menials & is kept to tend a garden in a sort of slavery. His father, Buys after committing many acts of injustice & murder among the more southern tribes proceeded to the North East of the Bamangwato and there fell a victim to fever. The natives took possession of everything belonging to him. Even his children of whom by different native wives he had seven, the different chiefs took and distributed among their servants. This man had been given by a former chief of the Bamangwato to his present master, two brothers he informed me are still alive but in servitude to another tribe. He has forgot all about God & Jesus & only remembers that his father sometimes collected his children - read a book, and then knelt down to pray. He does not remember a single word of Dutch although I tried to recall it to his memory by frequently addressing him in that language. His owner would not consent to part with him so I was obliged to leave him in his sad position. And I could not help thinking that the passage "the seed of evil doers shall never be renowned" has found in him something like a fulfillment

Both Bamangwato, Bakaa & Makalaka have been visited during the last year by the commandoes of Mosilikatze and they are all in a much more impoverished condition than when I saw them last. The caverns of the Bakaa & Makalaka saved their lives; their property has all been carried off. The Bamangwato in addition to the loss of property have been considerably reduced in numbers in consequence of having been without retreats in which to hide themselves. Internal dissension

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too, during which the chief killed his own brother have tended to the same result -

During my last visit to the Bakaa a native who accompanied me was seized with fever just before we entered their village. A report was afterwards circulated that he had been poisoned by the people. This year they seem determined all cause for such an imputation for during my three days sojourn with them they gave me nothing but a little sweet reed and a few watermelons. These

were very good but my Bakwains (of whom I had three my own people being left with the waggon) said it was only a little water & complained bitterly of hunger. I felt it too but I had reason to be thankful for their stinginess. For when returning down their lofty rocks to our sleeping place below I was so interested in the questions they were putting concerning the subject on which I had just addressed them I forgot for a moment the dangers of the path I was descending. Presently however feeling as if falling down the precipice I made a violent effort to save myself but in doing so struck my hand against a sharp fragment of the rock And the testament being in that hand it served as a point of resistance between which & the rock a finger suffered compound fracture. I got a good splint made of a peice of sweet reed. My involuntary low diet saved me from irritative fever and though I did not rest a day in consequence of the accident it proceeded to heal kindly. One night however a lion of which there are very many in that country came very near to the bush where we were all sound asleep & then suddenly commenced his hideous roaring. - my ox leaped in among us - the poor Bakwains shrieked for fear and I half asleep and stupid seized a pistol with the disabled hand, fired but the rebound hurt me more than the shot did the lion. - it rebroke my bone. The Bakwains, who were most attentive to my wants during the whole journey of more than 400 miles, tried to comfort me when they saw the blood again running by saying "You have hurt yourself, but you have redeemed us, Henceforth we will swear only by you." Poor creatures I wished they had felt gratitude for the blood which was shed for their precious souls. The second edition of the fracture was worse than the first but as I can bear a little pain, it was

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not nearly so great a hindrance as you may imagine and it is now nearly well. The Lord has been exceedingly kind to me. He has shielded me in many such dangers. May my heart be stirred up to love Him more ardently and may his name be blessed for ever and ever.

I might have proceeded further into the Interior but as I was more than 200 miles north from the waggon and the people of it not very trustworthy, I deemed it more prudent to return. The only new people I saw besides the Bakalihari were a portion of the race of Makalaka. They live much farther North than the other ~~portion~~ tribe mentioned above and are within 2 days of Mosilikatze. They assured me that that Tyrant was still alive and still pursues his career of blood In returning I walked over what was once the site of his Town near Mosiga and where he suffered his last dreadful defeat by a handful of Boors. The grass had recently been

burned off the country so I got a good view of the whole and a few human bones were all that remained of what once belonged to the marauder. And these will soon be removed for the hyaenas are so plentiful in a few years they remove everything by which one could discover a recent field of slaughter. Mosilikatze is living at the distance of 12 days or about 200 miles North East of the Bamangwato.

To one other topic I feel compelled after a long & painful delibera-
-tion explicitly to advert, and while I do so I feel tremblingly alive to the responsibility which a statement in anyway calculated to influence the decisions of the Directors, necessarily involves. Every time I have the thought of the duty of making known my convictions my heart has palpitated with fear. But now when I hear of the glorious prospects opened up for missionary enterprise in China the dread of unfaithfulness overcomes the fear of ~~unfaith~~ misleading you. I feel consolation however in making known what I consider to be the peculiarities of this part of the world in the belief that you do not act in consequence of the convictions of a single mind, but from the knowledge derived from the sentiments of ^ all your other agents in the country. The conviction to which I refer is that a much larger share of the benevolence of the Church and of missionary exertion is directed into this country than the amount of population as compared with other countries, and the success attending those efforts seem to call for. This conviction has been forced upon me

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both by a personal inspection more extensive than that which has fallen to the lot of any other either missionary or trader and by the sentiments of other missionaries who have investigated the subject acc[-]
-ording to their opportunitites. In reference to the population I may mention that I was led in England to believe that the pop[-]
-ulation of the Interior was dense & now since I have come I have conversed with many both of our society & of the French & none of them could ^ reckon up the number of thirty thousand Bechuanas. But lest I should mislead I shall give the number of huts in each of the Towns not yet under the immediate influence of missionaries. I do so not with the hope that you will take my estimate as the truth but with the wish that it may lead to a call for statistical information before any other missionaries are sent here. If it is thought proper to accede to this wish & correct returns made I am confident the estimate I give below will be over not under the mark - My confidence arises from the following reasons. In every instance I give a larger number of huts than actually exist in order to obviate the possibility of mistake in counting. - A large proportion of the huts are store houses & not inhabited by any one - there are usually one of these to the hut of every wife - And there are others appro-

-priated as dormitories for the growing up daughters of families -
And the usual mode of reckoning five to a family ought not
to be adopted where as in heathen towns polygamy so extensive[-]
-ly prevails, very many have two wives, others have four
some six & others such as chiefs seven. Now each of these wives
has her own hut & store but for preserving corn &c. And
this state of things operates most injuriously against the
increase of children. The advantage which Christianity has
over heathenism in this respect is already quite apparent
in villages where the former has been adopted. On these grounds
I apprehend we ought not to apply the European mode of
computation here. Two or at most three to a hut is all
that can be given.

I begin with Taons the chief residence of the Batlapi
because although very near to M^f Helmore & frequently visited
by him it is compared to other parts destitute of the gospel
and it is one of the largest collections of population in the
country Huts 480 last year; but it has recieved by the arrival
of Sehitsane there this year about 150 more. Near to Taons

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there is another section of the Batlapi under a chief called
Motlabam. Huts 770 To which for those engaged in tending the
cattle of the tribe we may add 200 more. The whole of this
population being situated in a valley can be seen at one
view And to us who are more accustomed to see the dreary
wilderness than the pleasant harvests of men. Their
number seems prodigiously large. M^f Owen of the
Church Missionary Society thought there were at least
20,000 souls at Taons But had he adopted some method
of enumeration his estimate would have been less than
half that number. Such as it is however. What a mass
of precious immortals is congregated there. And how sad
it is to think of their state. They have fled from the
gospel and are to a man its bitter opponents -

The Bahurutse another tribe in that direction numbers 800
huts But no settlement could be made with them for though
friendly to missionaries they live in a most unsuitable locality
and are constantly longing to depart from it. Their own
country is in the neighbourhood of the Bakhatla and there is
every probability they will return to it as soon as they recieve
certain information of the death of Mosilikatze -

The villages of Litakong (Old Lattakoo) Linokaneng and
Morokueng the latter the residence of a large section of Barolon-
-gs are under the superintendance of the French bretheren
of ~~Motito~~ Moteeto but I may put them into the estimate as
750 in all.

The huts of the people of Sebegwe with those of three villages
of Bamaleti 500. These villages although some distance

from each other are not more than a day's journey from the Bakhatla, which have 400. Of Sechele chief of the Bakwains 300 - Of Bube 350. These are larger numbers than the Bakwain chiefs had last year But their increase being occasioned by the dispersion of the tribe of Sebegwe it will probably soon be diminished.

The Bamangwato are this year so situated among rocks I could not estimate their number but though I know they

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have suffered severely by the Matibele lest I should commit an error I set them down as at my former visit 600

The Bakaa 250 - The Makalaka 200 -

I do not take into the account the villages of the Bakalihari as they were all small and cannot be given as anything like an approximation to the number of the tribe. The other section of the Makalaka I had no opportunity of estimating. The sum total of the others is 5750 which we may call 6000, and applying the European average we have only 30 000 as the highest possible estimate. This is however much over the real population. Indeed I question if there are twenty thousand Bechuanas within the sphere of our society's operations. Certainly there are not forty thousand on the side of this 21st degree of the South Latitude unless we include those under the French & Wesleyan missionaries to the Eastward. Now for this comparatively small population we have no fewer than 12 missionaries & their wives. In this I include the two bretheren at Moteeto Also M^r Schreiner and one of the bretheren at Griqua Town as Bechuana Missionaries

In view of these facts and the confirmation of them I have recieved from both French & English bretheren computing the population much below what I have stated I confess I feel grieved to hear of the arrival of new missionaries. Nor Am I the only one who deplores their appointment to this country. Again & again have I been pained at heart to hear the question put. Where will these new bretheren find fields of labour in this country? Because I know that in India & China there are fields large enough for all their energies - I am very far from undervaluing the success which has attended the labours of missionaries in this land. No, I gratefully acknowledge the wonders God hath wrought and I feel that the salvation of one soul is of more value than all the effort that has here been expended. But we are to seek the field where there is a probability most souls will be converted and

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it is this consideration which makes me earnestly call the attention of the Directors to the subject of statistics. If these were accurately returned and there would be very little difficulty in doing so. (An individual could take a census counting each of the population personally in such villages as this in the course of a single day & the largest in this country would require very little more time) It might perhaps be found that there is not a country better supplied with missionaries ~~than any other~~ in the world. and that in proportion to the number of agents compared to the amount of population the success may be inferior to most other countries where efforts have been made

Well supplied as the country is it bears no comparison to the Colony. There the number of missionaries of different societies is so large compared to the population it must strike every one with astonishment. Algoa Bay for instance or Colesberg, villages not larger than Ongar which is I believe the smallest market town in England have each the gospel preached by three Evangelical ministers. And each of them feels convinced that he has a very large & very important field of labour. They do believe it. But in what way they have come to the belief I could not ascertain.

In conclusion I beg leave to say whatever may be the views of the Directors on this portion of my commun[-]ication I feel immensely relieved by making the statement I feel a load taken off my heart. And may the Lord in mercy guide them to the view of the subject which will tend most to His glory. I must also state that I have since hearing of the delightful prospects opened in China felt again the glowings of heart towards that country which were familiar to my mind when I dedicated myself to the mission work there. I feel it is wrong to think more of another field than that to which in the Providence of God I have been called & endeavour to suppress my feelings But I tell you of them that

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you may judge how much ought to be dedicated from the force of these statements by taking the existence of these feelings into consideration

I am Dear Sir

Affectionately yours

David Livingston

Kuruman, June 24. 1843

D. Livingston

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