

Letter to Manning Prentice, 8 April 1842

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org), 2017

[0001]

8th April 1842

My dear Manning

I feel much pleasure in commencing an epistle to you but whether you will feel as much in perusing it is another question, The place whence I now write you is the residence of Bubi one of the Bakwain chiefs The town is situated on the top of a hill which forms part of a pretty extensive range and from its height it feels much pleasanter than in the plains below Round the bottom and through a deep defile which separates this from another part of the range runs a river not very large but superior to the contemptible thing that runs past Ongar. In this country such a stream is invaluable for irrigating the land. I came here for the purpose of assisting a native teacher to commence operations and likewise to perfect myself in the language by cutting myself off from all European conversation. A great deal of intercourse being necessary on account of the want [of] any dictionary except such as every one constructs for himself. After we commenced school for the children I wished to lead out some water to irrigate a garden for Pomore. (The teacher) And when I explained that this was my way of making rain and how far superior it was to their enchantments all were quite delighted with the idea. The chief sent as many men as I needed & we proceeded to operations in the best way we could. We have raised a huge dam of earth & stones and dug a canal which will water many gardens. And the whole of the labour has been performed by themselves for I was unable after the first day to stimulate them as I wished, on account of having got both legs & arms severely sunburned. And that too although most of the time immersed in the water the digging was performed by sharpened sticks. When they came to a large stone too large to lift out they had just to dig round it so it is quite of a zig zag form. The earth was lifted out in handfuls & carried to the dam in their karosses, a wooden bowl or tortoise shell. After nearly completing it a tornado came down & swept a great portion of our work away, but after looking a little with rueful countenances they commenced again with all their might. I have been the more astonished at the industry of these wild ignorant heathen, as the early missionaries could never get them to work. At Kuruman the missionaries have been obliged to perform most of the manual labour themselves. Working even for wages was almost out of prospect of a future benefit held out before them. I have no doubt but you could have managed the business much better I did not even think of it when I left home, (So I should imagine that many things of a like nature will occur to you and if

you can gain their attention and affection you will do great good among them) I am quite ignorant of the scientific way of irrigation. It was almost all guess work & with a trembling heart I watched until I saw the water assume its new course

[0002]

You can by ingenuity lead the people but one can never force them. They are mere children and although they have the passions of men they are as easily pleased as babies. Show one a looking glass & he will almost go into convulsions laughing at his own image. But if you are habitually kind to any one in particular you will spoil him & get the envy of the rest. He immediately thinks he has a right to what he gets & becomes impudent. To this the missionaries here never knew an exception. You require therefore to study their characters a little and then there is no difficulty in guiding them you must expect disappointments among them for they are an exceeding[-] -ly selfish race & it by no means leaves them entirely when they become Christians, to this however there are exceptions. The people here are more simple & know less of vice or at least the vices of Europeans than those further to the South. They don't hate the gospel because they don't know it. I think they are not so greedy either. Towards the South if one follows you into the field he will ask payment for it. May even the children after having enjoyed in play with the children of the missionary will sometimes come and demand payment for the same. Part of the reason of this may be the manner in which they treated the first mission[-] -aries induced them to give to almost everyone who asked. They live in danger of their lives & durst not say a sharp word to them. Here I have ventured on a different plan I pay all baneful debt mere begging I discour[-] -age by speaking out in pla[...][in] terms from the king downwards. They begin now to understand that I am not to be imposed on, the other day the king came & begged something. I answered Bubi you know I hate beggars. He disappeared in an instant. Some natives from a tribe about 100 miles south of this came on a visit while the dam was in progress & told the people that they ought to demand payment for that work. Next day when they began to be tired they told me what the strangers had said, adding that the missionaries at Kuruman always demanded gave payment & they did not mean to work without. I told them it was all kindness in one to show them how to do such a work & instead of my paying them they ought to pay me but as they were discontented we should drop it instantly. I left them immediately as it was only to try me they felt sorry they had proceeded so far and came begging I should not cease to show them how to work the king himself joining them saying I must not think of leaving them alone it was just their foolishness. Perhaps these little incidents will let you see what sort of people you will have to deal with. It is not so much the present as the future we have to look to. We must stimulate them to industry. Giving without making them feel that they have earned what they receive has a very bad effect it makes them covetous & does not tend to advance their civilization This is the effect of all these clothes sent out by kind friends in England. If it were in the power of the missionary to dispose

of these articles for payment in labour they would be a benefit to the people But they are to be distributed & the distribution however conducted is the cause of heart burnings without end amongst all both rich & poor. Even Mahura the chief of the Batlape grumbled because he did not get some of the clothes sent out for the

[0003]

poor of Kuruman. When you come therefore much of plans whereby you will make them benefit themselves. A trader can do more for the mere civilization than a missionary. The missionaries deny this but it is to me quite apparent. The natives here never imitate the missionaries. (I mean at Kuruman) We have Christianized but the natives have preferred to imitate the Griquas who have a remnant of the customs of the Dutch boor There is only one square house in K. besides those of the missionaries & traders & that was built by a Hottentot & is now uninhabited. All the Bechuanas live in their old beehive huts as they did in the beginning. At Moteeto there is not one native house square. And only now they are beginning at M^r Helman's to erect a few square houses. I dont know what is best to be done. I should think our chief hopes be in the infant schools Here I could build Thomas a house for a few lbs of beads & would certainly begin if I knew his intentions but I have not had a single line from him, If I were certain he would come I could place it in a sufficient state of forwardness for his reception soon after his arrival but I am quite in the dark. I dont like to begin one although it would not be great trouble while mixing with people to learn the language But perhaps I am speaking toconfid[-] -ently. I have not yet tried housebuilding though I succeeded pretty well in irrigation. You must take care & never let your temper get soured on beholding the ingratitude of the natives. You will be tried but rather be a stoic than otherwise. You ought to have a plow & above all a smith[']s apparatus if you can work a little in that way. But these things are not so absolutely necessary as the first missionaries would had you to believe. They were indeed for them but I have been unable to see that they are so to us, A good stock of medicines. These have [...]been] exceedingly serviceable to me but M^r Moffat will say the smiths bellows above everything. For this part & all before us beads are the only coin so as many of these as you can bring. You may either purchase these in the Colony or in England I suppose they are cheaper at home than in the Colony. They are the only circulating medium, tin vessels, knives snuffboxes must do instead of money, money itself wont, small looking glasses, here & nearer to Kuruman handkerchiefs. I did not like to give beads at first & so great was my prejudice against them I brought none to K. but I cannot now help thinking that they look much the better of a few round their dirty necks & arms. You need not fear the langua[...]ge] it is easy. I have found no difficulty with it & I am no great genius at the languages. M^r Moffat represents it exceedingly difficult & it was so to him but it will never be so to any one else. The only difficulty in it is the jumb[-] ling way of speaking it many of the natives have. With those who speak it well one finds no difficulty in understanding. It was indeed a great work in M^r M to reduce it to writing & no one can understand it fully but himself

M^r Hamilton is always quoted by M^r M as never having acquired the language but the reason is quite plain. He never once made an effort He has the Dutch will, is an easy soft sort of good man, uses an interpreter & thus content with his crutch goes on in the old way. Dont fear it

[0004]

It would be well for Thomas if he were ordained or had his A.M. You cant conceive how how much heartburning there has been among the missionaries on the subject of ordination. Those who look down on those who are not ordained. Both you & Thomas must feel yourselves thoroughly underpaid an[...][d] You must not take the opinions of anyone as your guide but examine for yourselves & act accordingly. Choose friends with whom you can assimilate of whatever society they may be & let the narrowminded touchy people pass b[...][y] This is what I am determined to do. I will never asociate with a London Soc. man because he is such, but with amiable Christians wherever I can find them A number of the missionaries are unordained M^r Moffat Edwards, Hamilton Hughs. I do not attach any importance to ordination I only wish all had been ordained it would have prevented some from despising others who remain without that ceremony having been performed on them. Please Remember me very kindly to Thomas: Firons, & Miss Ridley if you see her at anytime. I have just got one letter from home since I left, but I hope to find letters at K in June or July when I return. Will you write a long letter? There is no need for teetotalism here, they make beer but it does not intoxicate. it only causes sleep & profuse sweating. At Kuruman however they make intoxicating beer of honey

Care of Rev^d D^r Phillips ~~Cape Town~~

M^r Manning Prentice
1842 Violet Hill
Stowmarket
Suffolk
single sheet England