

DAVID LIVINGSTONE

MISSIONARY EXPLORER OF AFRICA

by

Jessie Kleeberger

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CHAPTER SIX

AFRICA'S DARK PICTURES

While Livingstone was still in Kolobeng new trouble arose.

European articles, and especially guns, were great attractions to the natives. So eager were they for them that they would sell several slaves for one gun. The slaves, of course, were usually people who had been captured from rival tribes. But it touched Livingstone to the quick to see scores of human beings dragged away in chains and urged on by rawhides, just for the sake of a few guns or other conveniences on the part of the heathen sellers, and for greater gain on the part of the civilized (?) traders. He was bound to do something.

If a legitimate trade in ivory, beeswax, ostrich feathers, and such products, in exchange for the European articles, could be established, this traffic in human lives could be stopped, he believed. The best way of opening up such trade, he thought, was by finding good trade routes from the interior to the coast so that the products might be shipped. And this was the big idea that seized him.

To accomplish this he would need perhaps two or three years free for traveling, and for this project he thought best not to expose his family to the dangers of the journeys since his wife's health was already failing. It was decided that she should return to England. And since the children must eventually go there for their education, it was thought best for them to go with their mother. However, it was a great sacrifice for the father to be left there alone in the Dark Continent.

The last visit at Kolobeng found the Bakwains scattered by the Boers. Sechele had even determined to go to the Queen of England to report the trouble. He went as far as the Cape, but had to give it up. However, Livingstone's influence stayed by him, and years afterward he eagerly read all he could find about the great missionary. He continued to live with his one wife a consistent Christian life and even became a good preacher. He also gathered about him many people from other tribes and devoted himself to their improvement. What, then, if Livingstone had won no more souls to CHRIST? Would not Sechele's soul and those won through his labors have been worth all the years in Africa? But could we only know, perhaps hundreds of other redeemed souls will meet Livingstone in the last day to thank him for the Gospel he had brought to them.

It was hard for Livingstone to leave the Bakwains, but he believed that GOD and duty were calling him to other fields.

When, on Mar. 16, 1852, Livingstone and his family arrived at the Cape after eleven years' absence from civilization, they found that their clothing was somewhat out of fashion. But through the kindness of Mr. Oswell they were able to make themselves more presentable. About five weeks later, as the boat steamed out of the harbor at Cape Town, Livingstone waved farewell to his wife and four children. One other, an infant daughter, lay beneath the sod at Kolobeng. His heart ached at the thought of his children's training being left to the care of others. But in Africa their lot would have been no better. There they would be exposed to the vile influences of the heathen.

During the two months that he remained at the Cape he took advantage of the opportunity to write a number of letters to his family. He also preached in English a time or two, something which he had not done for years. Besides this, he took one step toward stopping the slave-trade by arranging with a mercantile friend to direct the work of a native trader whom he employed, in lawful trade.

On June 8, he left the Cape with his wagon loaded to double its usual weight, because of his generosity in carrying everybody's packages. With many delays along the way, one the breaking of a wheel, he did not reach Kuruman until the last of August. But here again was the Father's tender care shown; for shortly before this the Boers had been engaged in a siege of plundering that might have endangered his life. As it was, on reaching his house at Kolobeng he found that nearly everything of value had been either stolen or destroyed.

In a letter to his wife he tells about the awful tragedy:

"The Boers gutted our house at Kolobeng; they brought four wagons down and took away the sofa, table, bed, all the crockery, your desk (I hope it had nothing in it - Have you the letters?), smashed the wooden chairs, took away the iron ones, tore out the leaves of all the books, and scattered them in front of the house, smashed the bottles containing medicines, windows, oven-door, took away the smith-bellows, anvil, all the tools - in fact everything worth taking; three corn-mins, a bag of coffee, for which I paid six pounds, and lots of coffee, tea, and sugar, which the gentleman who went to the north left; took all our cattle and Paul's and Mebalwe's. They then went up to Limaue, went to church morning and afternoon, and heard Mebalwe preach!

"After the second service they told Sechele that they had come to fight, because he allowed

Englishmen to proceed to the north, though they had repeatedly ordered him not to do so. He replied that he was a man of peace, that he could not molest Englishmen, because they had never done him any harm, and always treated him well.

"In the morning they commenced firing on the town with swivels, and set fire to it. The heat forced some of the women to flee, the men to huddle together on the small hill in the middle of the town; the smoke prevented them seeing the Boers, and the cannon killed many, sixty Bakwains. The Boers then came near to kill and destroy them all, but the Bakwains killed thirty-five, and many horses. They fought the whole day, but the Boers could not dislodge them. They stopped firing in the evening, and then the Bakwains retired on account of having no water. The above sixty are not all men; women and children are among the slain. The Boers were six hundred, and they had seven hundred natives with them. All the corn is burned. Parties went out and burned Bangwaketse town, and swept off all the cattle. Sebuli's cattle are all gone. All the Bakhatla cattle gone. Neither Bangwaketse nor Bakhatla fired a shot. All the corn burned of the whole three tribes. Everything edible is taken from them. How will they live? They told Sechele that the Queen had given off the land to them, and thenceforth they were the masters - had abolished chieftainship."

Though Livingstone was indignant over this outrage by the Boers, he could not help but see the humorous side also.

"Think," he wrote to a friend, "of a big fat Boeress drinking coffee out of my kettle, and then throwing her tallowy corporeity on my sofa, or keeping her needles in my wife's writing-desk! Ugh! and then think of foolish John Bull paying so many thousands a year for the suppression of the slave-trade, and allowing Commissioner Aven to make treaties with the Boers who carry on the slave-trade."

The reason, of course, why the Boers took so much of their spite out on Livingstone was because they knew he was opposed to the slave-trade. Then they blamed him for the way the Bakwains fought, claiming that he had taught them how to shoot Boers.

"The Boers are determined to shut up the interior," he wrote to a friend, "but I am resolved, by GOD's help, to open it. I will open a path through the country, or perish."

And it was the Boers who finally had to retreat when their republic became a part of the British Empire.

On account of the trouble with the Boers, it was with difficulty that Livingstone was able to get guides at Kuruman to go with him to Sebituane's country, but he finally got George Fleming, the native trader who had been appointed at the Cape. This time they took a new route, considerably to the west of the old one in order to avoid the Boers.

He was eager to go to Kolobeng to see with his own eyes the destruction that had been wrought by the Boers and also to visit the grave of his little daughter, but he would not run into danger unnecessarily. He was bound for Linyanti, the capital of the Makololo, the town which he and Mr. Oswell had visited two years previously. The country was flooded and they often had to wade through swamps and water three or four feet deep and to pick their way through trees, thorns, and rushes.

At last they emerged with hands and faces cut and bleeding and with their knees through their trousers. But that was not all.

In a letter to his wife he tells this incident:

"When walking before the wagon in the morning twilight, I observed a lioness about fifty yards from me, in the squatting way they walk when going to spring. She was followed by a very large lion, but seeing the wagon, she turned back."

Once more GOD had spared him, for his work was not yet done.

On reaching Linyanti, Livingstone found that another change had been made in the government. Ma-mochisane had found it difficult to get along with the number of husbands that her position required. So she resigned in favor of her eighteen-year-old brother, Sekeletu. How this new chief would treat him Livingstone did not know. But he was relieved to find him kindly disposed. He was expecting the missionary to bring him some miraculous benefits, but Livingstone told him that he had come to teach them about JESUS CHRIST and his salvation. This indeed would bring great benefits, but not as the chief had expected.

Shortly after his arrival Livingstone wrote thus in his journal:

"The chief presented eight large and three small tusks this morning. I told him and his people I would rather see them trading than giving them to me. They replied that they would get trade with George Fleming, and that, too, as soon as he was well; but these they gave to their father, and they were just as any other present. They asked after the gun-medicine, believing that now my heart would be warm enough to tell them anything, but I could not tell them a lie. I offered to show Sekeletu how to shoot, and that was all the medicine I knew."

"You are my new father. Do not leave me," pleaded Sekeletu, when he saw that Livingstone wished to go.

"But the fever, the fever!" answered the Doctor. "I can not bring my family here. I must look for a healthier spot. I will pass on to the north."

"Then I will go with you and will give you all you need for your journey," the chief continued, "for I can not part with you."

So they started out, accompanied by one hundred and sixty of Sekeletu's men. They had traveled but about sixty miles when they met Mpepe, Sekeletu's half-brother and secret rival, who had plotted to kill the chief. Three times on that day he attempted the murder, and each time was prevented in a seemingly accidental manner. Once Livingstone stood between Sekeletu and his brother's spear. Soon Mpepe was captured by Sekeletu's men and was killed. The incident was indeed unpleasant to Livingstone, but it worked out for the good of his cause. Mpepe favored the slave-trade, and had Sekeletu instead of his brother been killed, Livingstone's life as well as his project would have been put to an end.

The party now proceeded up the beautiful river which Livingstone had before this learned to be

the Zambezi.

The missionary had not long to enjoy the beauty of that stream before his heart was made sick by another horrible murder. They came to the town of Mpepe's father, and when it was learned that Mpepe and another headman had favored the plot to kill Sekeletu, the two men were captured, cruelly murdered, and their bodies thrown into the river to the crocodiles. Hurrying from the bloody scene as soon as possible, Livingstone did his best to show the people their guilt before GOD, picturing to them as best he could the scene of the last judgment when all such deeds would be made known.

A little farther on Livingstone met and had a talk with Ma-mochisane, Sekeletu's sister who had resigned in his favor. The Doctor was the first white man she had ever seen.

Finally, leaving Sekeletu, Livingstone proceeded northward to the very limit of the Barotse country, hoping to find a healthy climate, but he could find none.

The time spent in the Barotse country in one sense had been very unpleasant, for there he had seen heathenism in its grossest forms. He was often wearied with the wild dancing, the destruction of children, the drudgery of the old people, and the terrible murders. Then there was the piteous sight of children being snatched from their parents to be sold as slaves, and once the sight of a line of slaves attached by a strong chain. Nevertheless, he did his best as a missionary, preaching twice on Sundays sometimes to as many as a thousand people.

What a relief it was occasionally to sit down and turning his mind from all the dark scenes of heathenism, have a little chat, by letter, with his beloved wife and children. Every letter was full of tender affection and of advice to his little ones to keep JESUS uppermost in their lives.

"I have determined to find a route to the sea:" Livingstone told Sekeletu. "So I must leave you now. My plan is to go up the Leeba till we reach the falls, then send our canoe back and proceed as best we can, for we can not well use wagons on this road:"

New guides must now be procured, for George Fleming, the native trader, had returned to Kuruman and the Kuruman guides had not done well. He would leave his wagon and goods in the care of Sekeletu, for he knew of no better keeper in this vicinity.

Led by GOD's hand, he was going forth, as did Abraham of old, into a strange land not knowing whither he went. Dangers there were he knew, and he had no assurance that he would ever again see his wife and children. But he wrote to his friends, "Can the love of CHRIST not carry the missionary where the slave-trade carries the trader?" His own answer was, "Yes."

~ end of chapter 6 ~
