

DAVID LIVINGSTONE

MISSIONARY EXPLORER OF AFRICA

by

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ALONE ON HIS KNEES

When the fifty-seven men marched into the town, Livingstone's heart was made glad. These were men worth waiting for.

Several of them, including John and Jacob Wainwright, were native Christians educated at Nassick. With one exception they were all docile, courageous, and persevering. Livingstone said of them that they behaved as well as the Makololo, the men who had accompanied him on his trip to the western coast.

Livingstone's plan was to go south by Ufipa, thence around the southern end of Lake Tanganyika, cross the Chambeze, and finally reach the southern shore of Lake Bangweolo. Then he would travel northwest to explore the underground caverns of which he had heard, and on up to Lake Lincoln. "There I hope devoutly," he wrote to his daughter, "to thank the Lord of all, and turn my face along Lake Kamolondo, and over Lualaba, Tanganyika, Ujiji, and home."

But there was war in Fipa, and to avoid it they went a long way around, reaching Tanganyika at a point where the mountains were so precipitous that even the donkeys could not climb them and had to be dragged up. Livingstone was ill when they started out, and this rugged climb over the hot rocks with little water to drink completely prostrated him. Milk was the only food he could take. But it was almost impossible to drag the cows over these terrible rocks, and the box of condensed milk he had expected to have had been left behind.

At last the rain came, and the men welcomed it with delight. But before long they had more

water than they wanted. There were numerous flooded streams to ford and bogs to wade. Then there were the trials of false guides and a scarcity of food. Often he was almost too ill to make entries in his journal. Yet whenever the weather would permit he took observations and entered them. One night a mass of furious ants attacked him, driving him in despair from his tent.

Livingstone's last Christmas came in the midst of the trials of this journey. An ox was killed to furnish a Christmas feast for the men. And the good Doctor thanked GOD reverently for the gift of his Son, JESUS CHRIST.

In the second week of January they came near Lake Bangweolo. There the rains were incessant, and the sponges and swollen streams increased. Yet Livingstone could not help but notice the beautiful flowers with which the country abounded. There were orchids, clematis, gladiolus, marigolds, and many flowers of which we have never heard. And I wonder if this godly man did not think of them as little messengers from Heaven?

Livingstone was now no longer able to wade through the bogs and streams and he had to be carried upon the shoulders of his men. One stream which they thus crossed was nearly a quarter of a mile wide and came up to Susi's mouth. Yet that faithful servant gently carried his sick master, while men behind carried his pistols and rifle, holding them high above the water. Others, of course, had their loads of baggage. Fifty yards was about as far as Susi could carry his master. Then he was lifted onto another pair of strong shoulders, and another and another until, after an hour and a half they were all safely across. But the rain was pouring incessantly, and he was drenched to the skin.

To add to his difficulties, the natives of this district were distrustful and were constantly giving the wrong directions. And since it was too cloudy to take observations, he was uncertain where he was.

As they neared Lake Bangweolo, the streams became deeper. And the natives were so fearful of the strangers that they hid their canoes. So Livingstone and his men often had to go up a river for several miles to find a shallow place to cross and then come down again on the other side.

For two months they were thus wandering in and out among the swollen streams, while Livingstone was growing weaker and weaker.

At last they reached the lake, but could get no canoes. Then they came to the village of Matipa, a powerful chief, who had plenty of large canoes. He promised the use of them, but kept Livingstone waiting day after day. At last he furnished canoes, and they explored the lake in the pouring rain. The night was spent on a small island with an upturned canoe for shelter. "Nothing earthly will make me give up my work in despair," he wrote the next morning. "I encourage myself in the Lord my GOD, and go forward."

His last letters showed that he was more determined than ever to banish the accursed slave-trade.

To his daughter Agnes he wrote: "No one can estimate the amount of God-pleasing good that will be done, if, by Divine favor, this awful slave-trade, into the midst of which I have come, be abolished. This will be something to have lived for, and the conviction has grown in my mind that it was for this end I have been detained so long."

To his brother in Canada he said:

"If the good Lord permits me to put a stop to the enormous evils of the inland slave-trade, I shall not grudge my hunger and toils. I shall bless his name with all my heart. The Nile sources are valuable to me only as a means of enabling me to open my mouth with power among men. It is this power I hope to apply to remedy an enormous evil, and join my poor little helping hand in the enormous revolution that in his all-embracing providence he has been carrying on for ages, and is now actually helping forward. Men may think I covet fame, but I make it a rule never to read aught written in my praise."

After several days they reached the southern bank of the Chambeze and sent back the canoes.

Then they made a pad for the back of the donkey that Livingstone might ride on it. But he was too weak. In a short time he fainted and fell to the ground, and Susi and Chuma carried him back to the village. The next day they made him a litter of wood and grass, covered with a blanket. This they carried by turns over the flooded plains to the next village. For the next four days they traveled only an hour and a half a day, he was so weak. Unable to write in his journal more than the dates, he was careful to record them lest the record of time should be lost. On April 27, he wrote that he had sent to buy milk-goats so that he might have some food which he could safely take. But after scouring the country for two days, the men returned unable to find the goats.

On April 29, unable to walk from his bed to the door, he requested Susi to take down the side of the hut, that the kitanda (or litter) might be brought to his bedside.

Thus he began the last day of his journey.

When they reached a stream they laid him gently under a tree till the men had crossed. Then Chuma came after him. The canoe was too small to carry him in the kitanda, and he could not bear to have a hand put under his back to lift him. So by having Chuma stoop low he was able to lift himself onto the servant's back and thus be carried to the canoe and laid carefully in it.

The last mile of the journey, after crossing the stream he begged several times to be laid down. He felt too weak to be carried farther. But they soon reached Chitambo's village, whither Susi had run beforehand to build a hut. It was not quite ready; so he was laid under the broad eaves of a native's hut to shelter him from the drizzling rain.

When he was taken into his hut a rude bed was made and raised from the floor with sticks and covered with grass. A box served as a table, and a fire was kept burning outside. Thus they made him as comfortable as possible that night. The next day he was too weak to see Chitambo, but he hoped to receive him the following day.

Toward evening he asked Susi to bring him his watch and help him wind it. He asked a few scattered questions about the country, especially about the Luapula, and sighed when he was told that it was yet three days off.

Night came on, and the watchers sat around the fire. Shortly before midnight Dr. Livingstone called Susi and asked that his medicine and a little water might be placed near his bed.

Then feebly he said, "All right; you can go out now."

These were the last words he spoke to man. But who can tell with what words he committed to the Father his soul, his life's labors, and the welfare of Africa - his own dear Africa - with all her woes and sins and wrongs? For at four in the morning the boy who lay at the door called in alarm to Susi. Susi and five others followed him to the hut. Doctor Livingstone was not in bed. He was on his knees by the bed with his face buried in his pillow.

"Do not disturb him," said Chuma. "He is praying."

"But he has been there so long, I fear he is dead," the boy answered.

They brought the candle and came nearer. His breath was gone. His face and hands were cold. Gently his sad-hearted servants lifted him and laid him on the bed. Then they went outside to consult together.

It was near the dawn of May 1, 1873.

Alone on his knees in the heart of Africa he had finished his work - had resigned it to GOD.

~ end of chapter 17 ~
