

DAVID LIVINGSTONE

MISSIONARY EXPLORER OF AFRICA

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

MAKING A WAY TO THE COAST

The traveling outfit for the journey to the coast consisted of a few tusks, a small amount of coffee, cloth, beads, etc., five books, and enough oxen to carry the supplies. It was the longest and most dangerous journey Livingstone had made. The Makololo guides were faithful but were faint-hearted.

Livingstone himself was attacked by fever thirty-one times while on the journey. Food was scarce, medicines were stolen, and often they were attacked by fierce swarms of mosquitos. One time when he was suffering with fever the ox he was riding threw him off on his head. Another time when he was crossing a river the ox threw him off into the water. Then with the heavy rains and the necessity of wading through streams three or four times a day his clothes were constantly wet. But that was not the worst. Often when he was suffering most he would meet some savage warriors who would demand him to give them either an ox, a gun, or a man. Neither an ox nor a gun could be spared, and a man he would not give to be sold into slavery.

The course of the journey was first along the Zambezi River to its junction with the Leeba.

Then leaving the canoes, they traveled northwest and west till they reached St. Paul de Loanda on the coast. So beautiful was the scenery with its mountains and valleys and streams that sometimes Livingstone would forget his illness and troubles in the grandeur of the scene before him.

Coming to a burnt house in a village Livingstone was told by the headman of the village that it

was the house of a child of his. "She perished in it," he added, "and we have all removed from our own huts and built here round her, in order to weep over her grave." This was one example of tender feeling on the part of these people. But more often there were quarreling and fighting and bloodshed. So dark was the scene that the missionary dared not think on it continually. Besides finding delight in spiritual meditations he was able to find pleasurable recreation in science, especially in natural history, and there was an abundance of opportunity for studying it.

The people seemed to believe in a Supreme Being, though they showed no love for him and the only homage they paid him was in time of trouble, somewhat like their so-called Christian brothers. Their strongest belief was in the power of charms and medicines. They believed in the existence of souls after death, though some thought that certain persons were changed into lions, hippopotamuses, or alligators.

Livingstone longed to touch these darkened hearts with the Gospel, but with fever and with his throat troubling him too he was unable to preach regularly as before.

"Look out there! You had better keep away from that light. Do you see the spirits coming out of that machine? They will get into you and make you mad."

That was the exclamation of a father who saw his inquisitive son peering around Livingstone's magic lantern trying to learn whence the people came and whither they all went so suddenly. However, great interest in Bible stories was aroused with the use of the slides with the magic-lantern.

But oh, the other experiences that awaited the traveler!

With their food all gone they were compelled to kill a riding-ox. And then, according to custom, a part of that had to be sent to the chief. Even with that the chief was not satisfied. The following day he sent messengers demanding more valuable presents. The people gathered round Livingstone waving their weapons, and he barely escaped having them fall upon his head. But so tactfully did Livingstone manage the situation that the threatening storm soon passed over.

Passing on through the forest they came to another chief's village.

After Livingstone had talked to the chief he sent Livingstone a present of yams, a goat, fowl, and meat. In return Livingstone gave him a shawl and two bunches of beads. At first the chief seemed pleased, but later he came asking for more presents. Livingstone appeased his wrath by giving him an ox, and two days later they were again on their journey, only to meet other chiefs as unreasonable.

"We are the children of JESUS," said one of his men. "That is why they can't harm us."

But were all their gifts useless? Must they be turned back now they were so near their goal? It seemed so, for at the river Quango they were stopped again. "I will part with my blanket and coat if I have to," said Livingstone, for he was determined to gain a passage to the coast. But he kept both, for just in time a young Portuguese sergeant, Cypriano de Abrao, appeared and frightened the natives into obedience - once more GOD cared.

Nearer and nearer the coast they came, and Portuguese stations appeared every little while.

What a comfort to be met by white gentlemen who showed him all kindness, even to giving him a new suit of clothes, instead of having to give his oxen and shirts and razors in order to appease the wrath of a savage chief! At length Livingstone recognized the cool breezes from the ocean, and then, oh, joy! there lay the great, blue Atlantic only a short distance away. His goal was reached once more. What mattered it now if his clothes were torn, his store of supplies and his oxen were gone and his body wasted with fever? He with his twenty-seven followers could march triumphant into Loanda. This he did on May 31, 1854, and met Mr. Edmund Gabriel, the British Commissioner for the suppression of the slave-trade.

Imagine the sensation of sleeping on a clean, comfortable English bed after six months of lying on the ground. That was Livingstone's experience, for Mr. Gabriel showed him and his men every possible kindness, and even sent valuable gifts back to Sekeletu.

But there was one great disappointment for Livingstone at Loanda. Not a single letter awaited him. Evidently his friends had not expected him to reach the coast. But the kindness of Mr. Gabriel and other Englishmen partly made up for this lack. Then he was too busy a man to give way to melancholy. Through all his difficulties and his fever he had made careful scientific observations all along the way which he had forwarded to his friend, the Astronomer-Royal at the Cape.

These were rewarded with a great deal of praise, for they were said to be the most accurate observations of the country that had ever been made.

Then, too, had he not the joy of achievement to encourage him? He had found a way to the coast, had discovered a way whereby his friend Sekeletu might sell his tusks to far greater advantage, and had thus helped to expel the slave-trade. Now certainly he was entitled to an honorable passage home with all the joy such a trip included. But his task was not complete. He had brought twenty-seven men with him from the Barotse country, and knowing that they could not make the return trip alone, he would not leave them. Besides, he had not succeeded in finding a suitable place for a mission, nor had he discovered what he considered a real highway to the sea. He would travel from the interior eastward to the sea by way of the Zambezi and thus open up a trade route.

Home and friends were beckoning to him. Fever and every other danger threatened him from the wilderness. Yet he heeded neither, but turned his face eastward.

~ end of chapter 7 ~
