

Two Letters from David Livingstone

Tette, 11 Dec. 1858.

MY DEAR MR. STURGE,

You were kind enough to write when I was in England in commendation of the views you hold respecting war and the taking away of human life. I am sorry that I could not give that due attention to the subject as put forward by you as it deserved, and the letter having been mislaid, I think I cannot do better than try to enlighten you by way of answer. The loss of the letter having left me in such a state of darkness that will procure pardon for my presumption.

I love peace as much as any mortal man. In fact I go quite beyond you for I love it so much I would fight for it—You, who in a land abounding in police and soldiers, ready to catch every ruffian who would dare to disturb your pretty dwelling may think this language too strong, but your principles to be good must abide the test of stretching. Fancy yourself here. A man whom I cured of fever at Quilimane when on my way to England in 1856 no sooner heard of Luis Napoleon's emigration scheme than he purchased a quantity of gunpowder, armed his slaves and made a foray into the Licunga country, and brought back some hundreds of captives. Had you been one of the Licunga, you would have been knocked on the head as too old, and your wife and children would have lost that liberty for which our fathers fought and bled. Ah, but I would not have used any defensive arms say you; & would have been safe. Well, six of my Makololo men—very fine young elephant hunters all of them—went down from this about thirty miles *totally unarmed*. They had been in the habit of visiting different chiefs in the vicinity and were usually invited to shew the dances of their country. After doing this they generally were rewarded with a handsome present of food. In this instance the chief named Bonga requested them to dance. They did so. He then ordered them to be taken to a certain hut where there were provisions on pretence of

giving some, and killed the whole six. He was perfectly aware of their being my men, but he wanted certain parts of their bodies as medicine and killed two of them very cruelly. Had they been armed with revolvers their lives would have been safe. I think so, though it is the most earnest wish and prayer of my heart that I may never be placed in those circumstances in which it may be necessary to take away the life of a fellow man. I have done nothing but speak to his nephew about it, and send a message to the murderer—the only excuse he urges is a false one—not knowing they were my men. Well, the moral effect of doing nothing is this. Wishing to be on friendly terms with another chief north of this I sent him a handsome present, and a message explanatory of our objects, our wishes to put an end to their wars, etc., etc. He received it in a very cordial manner, and sent two men to see me. He presented two elephants tusks also. I would rather not have received them, but it was said a refusal would be considered an insult. I treated the two men as well as I could but they thought that I ought to have given more. I offered the tusks but they went off in high dudgeon, roaring out the threat that they would kill any of my men they met, and taunting me with “though Bonga killed six of your men *you did nothing* to him!” The people near to the Portuguese are much worse than those farther inland, but this is the place where your principles ought to be tested, not where the people are friendly or where the policeman keeps the peace. I have in no way been mixed up with country affairs. We went from side to side during the actual war—bought what we needed from each—cut wood on the rebels bank one day and wooded on the Portuguese bank the other. I am widely known as a man of peace. I could quote this were I disposed to accept evidence all on one side, but I know the other side of the question too, and I can never cease wondering why the Friends who sincerely believe in the power of peace principles dont test them by going forth to the heathen as missionaries of the cross. I for one would heartily welcome them from the belief that their conduct would have a good influence though it would never secure their safety.

D. LIVINGSTONE.

Tette, 28th Nov^r, 1860.

MY DEAR SIR,

In reference to your letter of 30th Dec^r 1859, giving me an account of the decease of our much esteemed friend Joseph Sturge, I may be allowed to explain that he favoured me with a letter while I was engaged with several very trying public meetings in Glasgow, Edinburgh, &c. I just opened it and saw that it was on the subject of Peace—then put it aside in the hope of attending to what was said the first time I had leizure. Unfortunately I never saw it again, & have no idea how it was lost. It however remained on my mind that I had not treated him as I ought to have done, and to get rid of that feeling I wrote stating some difficulties that seem to stand in the way of the adoption of Peace principles. You appear to have answered them very fairly and I thank you and Mrs. Sturge for the trouble you have taken. I pray that the Almighty may so guide my steps so that it shall never be forced upon me to fight with either black or white—but I cannot but believe that war in some cases is both necessary & just. At best it is a monstrous evil,—and never to be resorted to except under the gravest necessity. In African forays we have the worst evils of war and I think that Christians ought to exert themselves to establish lawful intercourse with the degraded heathen. It seems certain that intercourse will be established and the good ought to forestall the advances of the bad. Some of the Friends ought to put their principles to the test of practise and appear among us the harbingers of peace. I lately marched 600 miles up this river on foot—people all friendly except those near the Portuguese. I carried a stick only until passing through a tangled forest alone a Rhinoceros made a charge and stopped short when within 3 yards of me—ever after I carried a Revolver—My kind regards to Mrs. Sturge.

DAVID LIVINGSTONE.

Copied from the originals, the first in the possession of Joseph Sturge, of Birmingham, and the other belonging to Miss Magdalen Evans, of London.