

DAVID LIVINGSTONE

MISSIONARY EXPLORER OF AFRICA

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

HOW THE LION CHANGED HIS MIND

"There is no young woman here in Africa worth taking off one's hat to," Livingstone wrote to a friend who seemed to be trying to persuade him to marry.

But that was before he had his encounter with the lion.

So glad were the Bakhatlas to have the missionaries with them that they proposed moving to a more suitable location. The spot chosen was in a beautiful valley and was named Mabotsa, or "marriage-feast." But there was one trouble with the new locality. It was infested with lions, and Livingstone one time had an unfortunate encounter with one - unfortunate, did I say? Yet not altogether so.

In a letter to his father he mentions it briefly:

"At last, one of the lions destroyed nine sheep in broad daylight on a hill just opposite our house. All the people immediately ran over to it, and, contrary to my custom, I imprudently went with them. They surrounded him several times, but he managed to break through the circle. I then got tired. In coming home I had to come near to the end of the hill. They were then close upon the lion and had wounded him. He rushed out from the bushes which concealed him from view, and bit me on the arm so as to break the bone."

"What did you think when the lion had hold of you?" some one afterward asked.

"I was thinking what part of me he would eat first," was the grotesque reply.

The lion had one paw on Livingstone's head and was playing with him as a cat does a mouse, when Mebalwe, his native helper, came to his rescue. The wounded beast then sprang upon Mebalwe and bit him in the thigh, then grabbed another man by the shoulder. But in a moment the shots he had received took effect, and he fell dead.

How grateful Livingstone was then for his faithful Mebalwe whom a recent gift from a Sunday-school in the homeland had enabled him to hire! However, the lion had left eleven teeth-marks in Livingstone's arm and had crippled the arm so that he was never able to use it without pain.

And now in his suffering Livingstone's thoughts turned to Kuruman, two hundred miles away. That was the nearest place he could think of to which he might turn for rest and care. For three years while the Moffats were in England the station there had been his headquarters. But now they were at home.

In spite of his pain Livingstone enjoyed his visit with the Moffats.

The Doctor and his wife were kind to him, and he found their daughters, Mary and Ann, intelligent, capable young ladies, and "worth taking off his hat to." Indeed, the elder daughter, Mary, so revolutionized his mind on the subject of matrimony that he felt himself fast losing hold of his position. In her he saw everything that was needed to make an ideal wife for a missionary, and at last, as he himself said, he "screwed up courage to put a question beneath one of the fruit-trees."

When the answer came back - "Yes," Livingstone was very happy.

On his way home after the engagement Livingstone wrote Mary a cheery letter discussing some articles that were to be ordered for the house and asking her to have her father write to Colesberg about the license.

Are you curious enough to want to read his closing paragraph? Here it is:

"And now, my dearest, farewell. May GOD bless you! Let your affection be towards Him much more than toward me; and, kept by his mighty power and grace, I hope I shall never give you cause to regret that you have given me a part. Whatever friendship we feel towards each other, let us always look to JESUS as our common friend and guide, and may he shield you with his everlasting arms from every evil!"

This was the first of a number of love-letters that Livingstone wrote to his beloved Mary. She kept them all and found great pleasure in reading them years later during her lonely days in England.

And then the house - that was his first task after he had reached Mabotsa.

He himself was architect and almost sole builder. It was built of stone for the first five feet up from the ground. Then the falling of a stone, which almost broke his arm over again, caused him to change his building material.

At last the house was completed and the garden too was flourishing. Then Livingstone brought his bride to the dearest spot in all the world, there to begin missionary life in real earnest. Glad indeed was he that he had found some one to so completely change his bachelor ideas. He was weary of the lonely life where there was no one to converse with in his own language, no one but men to cook him a meal when he returned tired and hungry from a long tramp, no one to wash and mend his clothes, no one to care for him when the tropical fever raged, no one to put the touches of home into his dwelling. All these needs and more his Mary satisfied.

Livingstone wrote thus to his mother:

"I often think of you, and perhaps more frequently since I got married than before. Only yesterday I said to my wife, when I thought of the nice clean bed I enjoy now, 'You put me in mind of my mother; she was always particular about our beds and linen. I had had rough times of it before.' "

Before he was married Livingstone had started a Sunday-school. At that time he wrote of it:

"The poor little naked things came with fear and trembling. A native teacher assisted, and the chief collected as many of them as he could, or I believe we should have had none. The reason is, the women make us the hobgoblins of their children, telling them 'these white men bite children, feed them with dead men's brains,' and all manner of nonsense."

When Mrs. Livingstone came she began a dayschool for the children. Besides this and her regular household duties hers was the task of making butter, candles, soap, and other articles needed about the house.

So strong was Livingstone's belief in the value of native helpers that he proposed starting a seminary for the training of native workers. However, his plans met with discouragement and he was never permitted to carry out this project. Before long through the jealousy of a fellow missionary he was persuaded to give up his station at Mabotsa with his house and garden upon which he had expended so much loving toil and all his earnings. At this time the Bakwains were urging him to come to them. They were a tribe whom he had met before. They were now divided, one part under Bubi and the others under Sechele. The new station to which Livingstone went was at Chonuane. His salary for the year having been spent on the first home, it was with difficulty that he was able to provide a home at Chonuane. And under the stress of privations he wrote thus to the directors:

"We endured for a long while, using a wretched infusion of native corn for coffee, but when our corn was done, we were fairly obliged to go to Kuruman for supplies. I can bear what other Europeans would consider hunger and thirst without any inconvenience, but when we arrived, to hear the old woman who had seen my wife depart about two years before, exclaiming before the door, 'Bless me! how lean she is! Has he starved her? Is there no food in the country to which she has been?' was more than I could well bear."

Sechele became interested at once in Livingstone's preaching as well as in reading the Bible for himself. And now he did not know what to do with his too numerous wives.

He was eager, too, for his people to become Christians; so eager that he wanted to convert them with rhinoceros-hide whips. Of course, Livingstone objected to that. Sechele began family worship, and after some time he was baptized, at the same time sending away his extra wives in a kind and generous manner. Even then all their relatives turned against him, and the congregation was greatly diminished.

A peculiar bell-man was once called upon to bring the people together. Jumping up onto a platform, he yelled, "Knock that woman down over there. Strike her, she is putting on her pot! Do you see that one hiding herself? Give her a good blow. There she is - see, knock her down!" And all the women ran for the place of meeting, for each thought she was the one meant.

The missionary liked the bellman's results, but not his methods.

Livingstone had received calls from other chiefs to the east. He went, but he found another difficulty. The Boers-Dutch emigrants - who lived in the vicinity - were oppressing and cruelly treating the natives. Livingstone saw trouble ahead. He did what he could to stop their outrages. The best way, he thought, was to reach the hearts of the people. So he ordered some Dutch tracts to give out to the Boers.

~ end of chapter 4 ~
