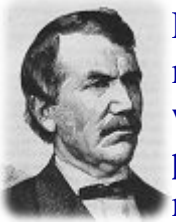


missionary heroes
David Livingstone

Over Thirty Years Missionary to Africa, 1840-1874

by Julia H. Johnston



People who know but one or two missionary names know this one. Anybody might well be ashamed not to know the name, and something about the work, of David Livingstone. He was a doctor, an explorer and discoverer, a philanthropist who did much for humanity, and, most of all, he was a missionary hero, who gave his life for Africa. What a splendid story is his.

The little David was born of sturdy, earnest Christian parents in the town of Blantyre, Scotland. His father, Neil Livingstone, was a traveling tea merchant in a small way, and his mother was a thrifty housewife. Before he was ten, the boy received a prize for reciting the whole of the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm, "with only five hitches," we are told. He began early to be an explorer, and went all over his native place. He loved to collect flowers and shells. He climbed one day to the highest point in the ruins of Bothwell Castle ever reached by any boy, and carved his name there.

When only ten, he went to work in the cotton mills, and bought a study-book out of his first week's wages. A schoolmaster was provided for evening lessons by the mill-owners. When David could have the master's help, he took it, and when he couldn't, he worked on alone. In this way he mastered his Latin. He was not brighter than other boys, but more determined to learn than many. He used to put a book on the spinning jenny, and catch sentences now and then, as he passed the place in his work. In this way he learned to put his mind on his book no matter what clatter went on around him. When nineteen, he was promoted in the factory. At twenty the young man became an earnest Christian.

It was about this time that Dr. Carey, sometimes called "The Consecrated Cobbler," stirred up the churches on the subject of missions. A good deacon formed a missionary society in Blantyre, and there were missionary talks, and the giving out of missionary books. David Livingstone became so deeply interested that, in the first place, he decided to give to missions all he could earn and save. The reading of the "Life of Henry Martyn" stirred his blood, and then came the appeals of a missionary from China, which thrilled the youth still more. At last he said, "It is my desire to show my attachment to the Cause of Him who died for me by devoting my life to His service." From this time he never wavered in his plan to become a missionary. He got a good preparation, through seven years of study, and became not only a regular minister, but a doctor as well.

The young man wanted to go to China, but the Opium War there prevented. Then Robert Moffat came home and Livingstone heard him plead for Africa and say that he had "sometimes seen in the morning sun the smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary had ever been," and this settled the question for him. He would go to Africa. His parents consented gladly, but you know that the parting was hard. Look at this picture. It is the evening of November 16, 1840. Livingstone goes home to say good-bye before he leaves his native land for the Dark Continent. He suggests that they sit up all night, and we can see the three talking earnestly together. The father is a man with a missionary's heart in him. At five in the morning they have breakfast, and kneel for family prayers, after David has read Psalms 121 and 135. Now the father and son start to walk to Glasgow. Before entering the city, the two say, "Good-bye," and part, never to meet again.

Arrived in Africa, Mr. Livingstone finds some easy work offered at a station, but pushes on seven hundred miles towards Dr. Moffat's station where heathenism is like darkest night. Here the people think him a wizard, able to raise the dead. An old chief says, "I wish you would give me medicine to change my heart. It is proud and angry always." Livingstone shows the way to Jesus. He is the first missionary who ever came into this region. How busy he is as doctor, minister, and reformer. He studies the plants, birds, and beasts. He finds forty-three different kinds of fruit, and thirty-two eatable roots, in one district. He sends specimens to a London college.

This man keeps on exploring telling of Jesus wherever he goes. When he writes home, his letters are covered with maps of the country. He is learning more about Africa than any one has known before. He studies the African fever, and the deadly tsetse fly, that brings disease. During this time he has the adventure with the lion, often mentioned, the fierce creature rushing on him, biting him and breaking his arm and crushing his shoulder. It cripples him for life, but he says little about it. In putting up a new mission building, he breaks the bone in the same place, but hardly mentions it. Years later, a company of royal surgeons identify the body brought home as that of Livingstone by the scar and the fracture.

For four years this missionary hero toils alone in the beginning of his life in Africa. Then he is happily married to Miss Mary Moffat, daughter of Dr. Moffat who told of the "smoke from the thousand villages, where Jesus was unknown." Now they work earnestly together, in the station called Mabotsa, where the chief Sechele is the first convert. Before he fully learns the "Jesus Way," the chief says to the missionary, "You cannot make these people believe by talking. I can make them do nothing but by thrashing them. If you like, I will call them all together, with my head man, and with our whips of rhinoceros hide we will soon make them all believe." But the missionary teaches him the true way.

He goes on exploring new fields, teaching, healing, and helping all the way. He discovers Lake N'gami. He goes into the interior forcing his way through flooded lands, through sharp reeds, with hands raw and bleeding, and with face cut and bloody. He sets himself against the slave-trade, "The open sore of Africa," as he calls it, battling heroically against it and enlisting others in the struggle. His wife and four children must go home, but the man stays, to work on alone.

Finally he disappears for three years. He is found in a wonderful way by Henry Stanley, whom he leads to Christ, but he will not return with him to England. He toils on and toils on, weary and worn. One morning in 1874, his African servants find him on his knees in his hut beside his bed. The candle is burning still, but the brave, unselfish life has gone out. They bury their master's heart under a tree, and carry his body on their shoulders a thousand miles to the coast — a nine months' march, then send it home to England. There it sleeps to-day in Westminster Abbey, but the hero and his work live unforgotten and ever-to-be-remembered while the world endures.

Copied by Jason Butte for www.SowingtheWord.org from Fifty Missionary Heroes Every Boy and Girl Should Know by Julia H. Johnston. New York: Fleming Revell Co., 1913.