

## *missionary heroes*

### **Robert Moffat**

Missionary to South Africa, 1817-1870

by Julia H. Johnston

Is it not wonderful to think of doing one thing for over fifty-three years? That was keeping at it faithfully, indeed. Robert Moffat was a hero missionary in South Africa for as long a time as this, and never once said he was tired of it and would give it up.



This brave missionary came into the world December 21, 1795, in a little town in Scotland. His parents were poor in this world's goods, but rich in having seven children, and they were sturdy, honest, good people.

When the little Robert began to go to school he had no text-book but the Westminster Shorter Catechism, with the alphabet on the title-page. He did not care very much about study, and the master sometimes tried to help him with his rod. When he grew older, he longed for "a life on the ocean waves" and ran away to sea. He had some hard times, and several narrow escapes, which made him glad to give up a sailor's life. He then attended a school which pleased him better than the first one, and studied bookkeeping, astronomy, geography, and mathematics. It was well that he gave his mind to these studies then, for in six months his school days ended. At fourteen the boy became self-supporting, being set to learn gardening.

Robert's mother, good, earnest Christian Scotch woman that she was, did a great deal for her son. She was very much interested in missions, and it was from her lips that he first heard about the heathen, and the work of helping them. The mother talked cheerfully and wisely to her children, as they sat about the fire in the evenings, all knitting busily. The boys as well as the girls used to knit in those days. What do you think of that? Certainly it was a useful thing to do.

The gardener, to whom Robert was apprenticed, was a hard master, and it was then, when it was so hard to get, that the boy began to long for a better education. He joined an evening class and began to study Latin and geometry. He also learned to use blacksmith's tools at this time, and how to play on the violin. His music was a great comfort to him long afterwards, and everything he learned was of use to him as a missionary. At sixteen he went to England. His mother asked him to promise to read the Bible every day. He gave his word and kept it. In England Robert the gardener found a good place, and his master, seeing that he was anxious to learn, encouraged and helped him to study. Not long after beginning the life in England, the young man was invited to some special meetings and gave his heart to the Saviour. He was so happy that he wanted to tell everybody, and then an intense longing came into his heart to carry the

news to the heathen. But he was not yet fitted to be a missionary and the London Missionary Society refused to send him. But one of the officers became interested in him, and advised him to come to Manchester, and study under his care. A Mr. Smith, who was much interested in missions, gave the young man a place in his nursery garden. It was a very good place, and more than that, gave him a chance to know Miss Mary Smith, who afterwards became his devoted and helpful wife.

By and by Mr. Moffat was accepted by the Missionary Society and began to prepare for his life as a missionary. When the time came, he had to go alone to Africa, as Miss Mary Smith's parents felt that they could not give up their bright young daughter, though she was willing to go as the missionary's bride to the dark land so far away. Mr. Moffat set forth on his lonely way. Arrived in Africa, he had all sorts of trials and dreadful experiences for more than a year before he reached the station in Namaqualand, known as Afrikaner's Kraal, north of the Orange River. Afrikaner had been a fierce and cruel chief, but some missionaries had led him to Christ. He now welcomed Mr. Moffat and said he must stay. He bade the women bring materials for a kraal, or house of poles and mats, plastered with mud, and shaped a little like a beehive. In half an hour the kraal was finished, and the missionary lived in it six months, though it was not very comfortable to have the hungry dogs running in and out, and snakes dropping down at any time.

One of the first things Mr. Moffat taught the people was to wash themselves and put on decent clothing, while he told them of Jesus who would take away their sins. The chief gave him two cows which saved him often from going hungry to bed, as his salary was not quite \$120.00 a year and how could he get everything needful with that sum?

After two years and a half, Miss Smith's parents consented to her going to Africa, and after a long voyage of several months she arrived, and was married to the good missionary. The two opened many stations, and did their work under the greatest difficulties that you can imagine. It was very hard to learn the language, for it was not written and there were no books. The interpreters took pleasure in telling them the wrong words, which made it harder. At last Mr. Moffat was able to write a spelling book and have it printed in England, afterwards writing a catechism, and translating parts of the Bible. Nine years passed before there were any great signs of success, but then there was a wonderful awakening among the Africans, and a new church had to be built to hold the converts, while the sound of praise and prayer came from many homes. After twenty-three years of service, Mr. Moffat took his wife and returned home for a visit. After telling his story, and receiving great honours, he went back with Mrs. Moffat to the work they both loved. After thirty years more, they returned to England.

The next year Mrs. Moffat died, and twelve years later, aged eighty-seven, the husband followed. He who once said, "I have sometimes seen in the morning sun the smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary has ever been," went to many of them with the true light that still shines.

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