

Letter from FWW to The Net from Nongoma – November 1st 1894

A visit to the Queen – Dininzulu's mother.

From Mr. Walters we have an account of a visit to Dininzulu's mother. We are glad that he reports of himself and Mrs Walters and the rest of their party that they are all "very well and happy."

Nongoma Zululand November 1st 1894. - I must give you an account of my first visits to Dininzulu's mother and to Joseph's settlement at the Isikwebezi River. Since that time I have been several times to Okamusweli's kraal, but have not yet found an opportunity of paying Joseph a second visit. He lives in such an ungetatable place, or at least I have not yet been able to discover an easier road thither, and I have felt somewhat chary of attempting such a journey again without a guide.

My first visit to Dininzulu's mother was on Sunday, April 29th. I had spent the previous night at Cheeseman's store, celebrating the following morning for Mrs Cheeseman. I had arranged with Joseph, who was then fetching Captain Pearce's new house, to meet me there and conduct me to the kraal. He has held occasional services there, and so was well known to the people, and had told them of my proposed visit. Joseph knows very little English, and would have been of no use as an interpreter, so it was fortunate that I met Ernest Butelezi coming back from Kwamagwaza the previous day. He had gone there with Mr. Frere to execute several commissions for me, as I was, much to my regret, unable to get away for the Synod.

Joseph kept his appointment, punctually, and so after breakfast we made our way to the kraal. It took us about half an hour to get there; we seemed to do nothing but ride in and out of steep dongas. The kraal contains some 30 huts, and is surrounded by a fence of thorn bushes, with, of course, the inevitable cattle kraal inside. Several men were at the entrance, mostly old men, reminding one of the elders of old time, 'sitting in the gate.' Joseph went to announce my arrival. Meantime, an Induna came to welcome me. He is an intelligent fellow, and having learnt to read a little and to put on clothes, when attending Dininzulu for a time at St Helena, considers himself above the average. I had previously met him at the courthouse; He is in heart a Christian, but is afflicted with some eight or more wives.

I had not to wait long when Joseph returned to say that Her Majesty had gone 'ukugeza,' i.e. to wash herself, but that, as it was too hot for me to remain outside, I was invited to go inside her hut. So we quickly made our way to the upper end of the kraal, and found ourselves opposite another enclosure with a very narrow entrance. Going inside this, we saw in front of us a very large hut, beautifully thatched. Crawling along in the usual Zulu style, we made our way to the farther end, and dodging the fire grate and some dusky forms, we eventually found ourselves seated on the floor. Following out Zulu etiquette, we took no notice of the occupants of the hut, beyond glancing at them while they stared at us.

I began conversing with Ernest, when very soon 'sa ka bona' came from a very fine fat woman, clothed in a red tablecloth and sitting on a grass mat. I replied with the customary grunt, and asked Joseph who she was. 'Okampanda,' he replied. i.e. A daughter of Panda, Ketchwayo's father. Then followed 'sa ka bona' in rapid succession from every other occupant of the hut, replied to by as many grunts. I learned that two of Ketchwayo's inferior wives and two of the princesses had saluted me. Okampanda renewed conversation by asking me for a shilling. This request met with a diplomatic answer. The royal family are dreadful beggars, but they say it is a mark of good breeding to beg. Then they wanted to know where I came from, etc etc and they asked Joseph about the Red Sea, wanting to know if it was really red, and all about Egypt, and seemed very delighted when I promised on my next visit to bring a map.

Soon the small doorway became darkened, and we perceived a very stout figure crawling in. After seating herself in the usual fashion (she had a green tablecloth on), Joseph respectfully inclined towards her, and looking at me said, 'Inkosi kazi'. I grunted, and looked another way. 'Sa ka bona' came, as soon as she had recovered her breath. Then came a lot of questions about her various ailments. I placed my stethoscope to her chest, but failed to discover anything the matter. Then she went on to say how glad she was I had come to see her, and that they loved God now. After a little of this we went outside, and found over 40 men assembled in the private enclosure for service. The women all trooped in immediately after, the sexes sitting apart to stop the royal party sat by themselves on mats.

The service was necessarily a mission service. The people were all very reverent, and repeated the Lord's prayer and the Amens, the latter producing a most sonorous sound and rolling away in the distance. Poor things! How I longed to be able to talk to them in their own tongue of the love and mercy of God. But I could not, and had to speak through an interpreter. Ernest read the first chapter of St John, and then I said how glad I was to come and live amongst them, and how glad I was to see so many there. I told them I was sent by the great white teacher (i.e. the Bishop) to help them to learn to love God and to keep his commandments. Then I gave a short sketch of the fall, gradually leading to the coming of our Lord, etc etc. Immediately after the Service I took leave of Okamusweli, who shook my hand for a long time, and asked me when I was coming again, ending with 'Ngi funa ingubo'. (I want a blanket or dress.) I said I will remember and departed.

A crowd collected round us at the gate as we rode away, giving us the usual good bye. We were at home in two hours' time, after a very hot ride. Needless to say, I felt very much encouraged at what I had seen, and also very thankful. We now hold services that every Sunday. Okampanda is desirous of Holy Baptism, and is, I believe, a sincere believer. Three or four of the young princesses are learning, under Mrs Walters' direction, how to make their own dresses. They expect us to supply the material.