

Bleek

Charlton House, Mowbray.

nr Cape Town South Africa

Sept 8th 1875.

My dear Sir George

I have been trying to write & tell you some of those things regarding the last months and years of my dear Husband's earthly life which I think you will care to know, but not being very well just now find it unusually difficult to write both clearly & concisely. It seems therefore wiser to try and tell you those things which regard the Grey Library more directly, on this separate sheet of paper, asking you to keep my longer letter to read at leisure. I trust that the few lines which my Sister Lucy wrote to you in my stead by the mail of the 25th August will have come into your hands before this reaches you, but, at any rate, you will probably have already learnt from the public prints that he to whom you have been so true & kind a friend has been taken to his rest. The end came very suddenly, early in the morning of the seventeenth of August, after an illness of only three hours duration. On the sixteenth my Husband was detained at home by rainy weather, ~~to~~ which, since his illness in the end of June, he was forbidden to expose himself. He therefore sent his keys (i.e. the master keys of the cases &c in the Grey Collection) to Mr Maskew's care, according to his usual practice in such case of unavoidable absence, it having been decided by Committee of S.A. Public Library some eight years ago that should the Custodian of Grey Collection be absent thro' illness or other cause "the Chief Librarian of S.A. Public Library" was to have the acting charge.

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On the following day, as soon as I could sufficiently collect my thoughts after the terrible shock of the loss which had befallen me with such awful suddenness, I wrote to Mr Maskew, saying what had come upon us during the past night, & asking him as a favor, that, if it might be, the drawers &c in the room of the Grey Collection should be left unopened until such time in the following week as I could manage to come to Cape Town & look through their contents, so as to remove any private letters or papers which might be lying there among those pertaining to Dr Bleek's official work. I received a kind answer promising that nothing should be touched till I had been. I was doubly glad of this feeling that this promise, if kept, would ensure the safety of the treasures in the Grey Library, at all events for a few days until the Trustees of that Collection should have time to take action in the matter. I think it was on the following day that Sir Thomas Maclear (our kind friend & next door neighbour) wrote to ask, as Senior Trustee of your Library, where the keys were &c. I told him how matters stood, & in his answer to my note he said "I wish the Government would be so good as to allow Miss "(meaning my second Sister Lucy, who for many years past has so greatly helped my dear Husband in his Bushman & other work) "to act as Curator, until the wishes of Sir George Grey can be known. I throw out this hint without communication with any one & in ignorance if your sister would like to do so". Sir Thomas also kindly offered to take me himself to do my hard task at the Grey Library, fixing the 26th Aug for that purpose, my first free day after the mail for Europe would have left. Unfortunately I was too unwell to go when the time came. On the 28th, two days later,

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a joint meeting of Trustees & Public Library Committee took place, as a result of which we had a visit in the afternoon of that day from Dr Dale, as Chairman of S.A.P.L. Committee to ask my Sister Lucy on behalf of that body to undertake to complete the detailed Inventory of the contents of the Grey Library &c, at half salary; giving meanwhile the acting Custodianship of the Collection to Mr. Maskew. Lucy saw many difficulties in the way of attempting to work at all at the Grey Library under such an arrangement, and spoke of all these more or less frankly to Dr. Dale; besides of course telling him that she had neither the necessary experience or education to enable her to deal with many of the books & manuscripts in the Grey Collection. It appeared that one great reason which had prompted this request to my sister was the knowledge of how long she had helped Dr Bleek in different ways, & would therefore be better able than another to decipher his handwroteing &c, & make a fair copy of some portions that he had only as yet prepared in the rough. The Committee appeared to have already thought of my Sister's probable (possible) difficulty with regard to some books, (Greek Latin &c) & had prepared to meet it by appointing three of their number, Dr Dale, Mr Cameron & Mr Fairbridge, to act as a sub committee of reference to give her help where she required it. I think I will now only refer you to enclosed copy of my sister's letter to Dr Dale, as chairman of S.A.P.L.C., sent after much reflections & after consultation both with personal friends & Trustees, in answer to his visit. Merely premising that, beyond the surface difficulties mentioned ~~xx~~ or indicated in her letter, there were several graver

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ones which I can speak of confidentially to you dear Sir George, and which it seems wiser not to omit, if you are to be put in possession of the real state of affairs here, which we, at this great distance from you both of time & space, are most desirous that you should be, in justice to all the things & persons concerned. One is the deep distrust which my dear Husband had of Dr. Dale personally, not only since the latter has been one of the S.A.P.L. Committee, but for years previously; and, for which, even so far as our own lesser knowledge of what happens out of doors is concerned, we could see he had grave reason.

Another lies in the personal character of Mr Maskew, whose great ignorance, i.e. both as regards personal absence of education, & also ignorance as to the proper methods &c for conducting even such an institution as the S.A. Public Library, render him utterly unfit even for the temporary charge of the Grey Collection. Added to this there is a kind of easy-going carelessness, a want of strict regard for truth, & a want also of moral courage, which renders him not the kind of man with which any person, more especially a comparatively unprotected lady, would care to share a divided responsibility of the kind in question.

On the 28th Aug^t the remaining Trustees (three in number, viz: Sir Thomas Maclear, Mr Fairbridge & Mr Hiddingh,) had also proceeded "to fill the vacancies caused by the absence from the Colony or death of Mr Porter, Mr Tasker Smith, Mr Charles Bell, Mr Justice Watermeyer and Mr Advocate de Wet". The names of the newly elected Trustees are Dr Dale, Abraham de Smidt, (Surveyor General) Mr Cameron, Dr Ebdon (M.D. of Rondebosch) and Mr Merriman (recently

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appointed Minister of Public works). On the following Saturday, Sept 4th, there was a general meeting of Trustees & S.A.P.L. Committee, at which my sister's letter in reply to the proposal verbally communicated to her by Dr Dale as Chairman was read. I must here note that it was not a full meeting of Trustees, so far as the newly elected ones were concerned, Mr de Smidt for instance not having known of it till afterwards. On the afternoon of that day Dr Dale again called here to communicate to us the results of the meeting. It appeared from his statements that there had been a strong desire on the part of a large section at the meeting to give the care of the Grey Collection permanently to Mr Maskew, at the same time raising his present salary considerably, & giving him the help of an additional clerk, -"swamping the Grey Librarianship entirely as a separate office & making the Collection merely another room of the Public Library". Dr Dale Mr. Fairbridge Mr Hiddingh Sir Thomas, (& I think, either one or two more whose names I am not certain of,) opposed this as strongly, - some of them (as Sir Thomas) wishing to give the temporary acting Curatorship entirely to my sister; others to get her to work on at the Catalogue, while giving Mr Maskew the name of Acting Curator, "the general responsibility", and the duty of shewing books to visitors. Dr Dale further said that after some difficulty a resolution had been carried empowering him to again ask my sister Lucy to work at the Catalogue, with a view to its completion, & to do this for the period of twelve months, at half salary. Mr Maskew meanwhile having the name of acting Curator &c, during the official

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vacancy of the Grey Librarianship, together with a gratuity as an acknowledgement for the same - and the fifty pounds of the original salary which they could then still have in hand, to be denoted towards defraying the costs of the printing &c of the detailed inventories prepared by the late Librarian. He spoke also of trying to get a small grant from Government to enable them to complete the printing &c, - this appropriation of the £50 towards it, being mainly as an earnest on their part of their wish to take action in the matter. Dr. Dale further told my sister that she was to have free access to all the materials &c in the Grey Collection for the purposes of her work, & much urged her undertaking it. Saying that the present arrangement was the only one which they could carry against the adverse section of the Committee, by which they could keep the whole question an open one for the present, thereby gaining time both to communicate with you, & also to try & get from the Cape Government some additional grant towards supplementing the £250 salary hitherto attached to the Grey Library, thereby hoping to be able to hold out sufficient inducement to attract "some good man" from home i.e. England, to fill the post.

This is mainly the sense of what Dr Dale said which I have tried to give rather fully because his official letter on the same subject sent to my sister two days later is somewhat barren. A copy of this letter, & also of her intended reply to the same, which she has submitted to Sir Thomas for approval but not as yet sent in, are also enclosed. It is very reluctantly that Lucy consents to have any thing to do with the matter, under the present arrangements, & I think her consenting at all is mainly in deference to the strong feeling & wish of Sir Thomas, not only as Senior Trustee of those originally selected by yourself, but also as the one who is most thoroughly in earnest in the matter, & appreciates both the value of your gift to the Colony, & the labour bestowed upon it by my

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Husband; & the duty & right on the part of the Trustees &c of providing some worthy successor in the Grey Librarianship. My own wishes may perhaps have some small weight with her also; and I own I am anxious that she should give the thing a fair trial, mainly that the question may be kept an open one until we can hear from you. She reserves to herself the right of giving it up at once, if she finds herself unable rightly to continue it; and as the question of the half salary is of no moment in either her eyes or my own (save perhaps as disliking even the appearance, to those who are mere outsiders, of either suggesting or acquiescing in one of those family arrangements which one occasionally sees wrongly made regarding places of trust) the matter is in some ways simpler. Were it not that the oft-times daily, & in any case frequent, visits to Cape Town, to work in the Grey Library, will entail an additional expense, which, to one with her own small private means, will be too heavy for her rightly voluntarily to incur, my sister would prefer to give her labor freely to making any uncopied portions of the work done (in the matter of detailed inventories &c) by my dear Husband both permanently safe & available for general use; well as to have set aside the monthly half salary offered her by the committee, to assist in providing for the costs of printing, &c. But this we cannot wisely venture upon just now.

There is one more thing which I had better mention before closing my letter, as you may not be aware of it; which is, that for several years past my Husband has repeatedly applied to the S.A.P.L. Committee either for permission to print such portions of the detailed inventories as he had made quite ready for the press; or for clerkly help in making fair copies of other portions &c, and always with a more or less unsatisfactory result. On one occasion only, did the Committee give him some help, which was in allowing a young man who was Mr Maskew's assistant in the Public Library to do some copying for him. But as Mr Maskew

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either could not, or would not, allow this Mr Allman to work even for two hours daily in the room of the Grey Collection under my Husband's own eye, a large portion of those detailed inventories had to be left uncopied, it being work which could only thus be done. It seems as tho' the funds of the S.A.P. Library are not well managed & that the Committee have thus no funds at their disposal for such printing &c. But my Husband always said that if they went the right way to work (submitting yearly clear statements of accounts &c) to Parliament), they could get more money where really wanted. But besides this real or apparent monetary difficulty that might at times stand in the way of the Committee granting what my Husband wanted, there was a still greater obstacle in the jealousy of poor Maskew, & in the gross ignorance of some members of Committee which made them but tools in the hands of others.

It is almost pitiful, on looking through drafts of my Husbonds letters addressed to the monthly meetings of the S.A.P.L. Committee from time to time for many years past, to see how he always has to make the same requests in vain, & how these requests become more & more urgent, with allusions to his failing health &c as an added reason against further delay.

Some time, if we are able, we will copy for your perusal some of these with the replies rec^d by him. You will then be better able to judge against what a mass of ignorance & prejudice he has been patiently laboring; & be also better able to understand why there has been apparently so little result from his years of quiet toil - - - unless one goes to the Grey Library & sees the mass of manuscript inventory lying quietly on a shelf in one of the corner cupboards.

We have remembered one more thing which it may be well for me to tell you, viz: that when my sister Lucy was in Europe last year she made enquiries, by my

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Husband's wish, regarding the possibility of finding some young, but well trained, philologist, who wd be willing to come out here & help him in his work. The following extract is from a letter from Lucy to him dated Munich, 16 Aug/74. begun after an evening spent at Professor Martin there, & continued from Trevisa a few days later. Lucy writes, "I told him"(professor) "how much you wished to have some educated German help - He says that if one could some appointment of £150, or £180 or so (I think he mentioned £200 also) for some young man to hold (so as to have enough to keep him in what H. says is a very dear place to live in); then he thinks some one could be found to go - But not without an appointment; nor even for one of so little as £100 a year".

We hear so much just now as to the improbability of getting any "good man to come out from home" i.e. England "to fill the post of Grey Librarian here" for "such a miserable pittance as £250", &c &c that one cannot help wishing that those in temporary authority here had a little more knowledge of how these things are on the Continent, where learning seems to be followed so much more for its own sake, & less for that of the loaves & fishes which it may eventually bring in.

For I do believe that if they were honestly in earnest here, as to the with they express about filling suitably the vacant post in your Library, & would put themselves in communication with Professors Müller, and or any one else at home on whose judgement & knowledge of such matters they could reasonably rely, a properly trained scholar could be found in Germany who would not only do well his official work at the Grey Library, but also be thankful for the opportunities to pursue collaterally with them his own philological or other studies which such an appointment here would afford to him.

Sept 10th - My sister has found time to copy one of my Husband's last letters addressed to the S.A.P.L. Committee, and I gladly enclose it to you,

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feeling that to you, who knew both him & the nature of the work he was trying to achieve, it ~~will~~ will speak volumes.

As usual it brought no satisfactory result, no aid being afforded to him.

I will now close this long letter, trusting that it may not have tried your patience too much to read it through; but in ignorance of how far my dear Husband's letters, or those from others here, have sufficed to keep you au courant regarding matters at the Cape, it seemed safer to omit nothing which might be necessary to a clear understanding on your part of the present state of affairs, in case, as I cannot help earnestly hoping, you may see fit to take any immediate action in the matter.

With my respectful regards,

Believe me to remain, my dear Sir George,

gratefully & sincerely yours

Jemima C. Bleek.