

UNITED FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.
SCOTTISH LIVINGSTONE HOSPITAL.

Superintending Missionary :
P. M. SHEPHERD, O.B.E., M.B., Ch.B.

MOLEPOLOLE,
via GABERONES, B.P.
SOUTH AFRICA.
25th April, 1940.

Dear Robert,

I fear I have been rather long in answering your queries re Circumcision.

In the B.P. there has been no circumcision school in the Serowe district since Khama's day, and in the Kanye district there has also been none since early this century when the late Chief Bathoen was converted.

In Molepolole we have had it regularly, I understand, every 5 to 7 years. The last was in 1931 - just after I came to Molepolole - but I am assured that it is not the intention to have it again. The sons of church members have not been circumcised, the parents of a boy who went to the Circumcision School were liable to be suspended from church membership.

My own view medically is that I am prepared to circumcise if there is a medical reason for so doing. In West Africa I did quite a few who asked me to do so, but there were no circumcision schools in that part of the world - not as we know them here. In Molepolole I have done only one circumcision, as far as I remember, and it was on a young man who medically required it.

But even if we were to circumcise with modern aseptic methods would there be much gain? I mean circumcise on a wholesale scale. Here when a circumcision school commences it lasts roughly one month at home and 8 to 10 weeks in the school or camp. The actual act of circumcision takes only a fraction of the time spent in the school - say three weeks roughly. And if a lad was circumcised by a doctor and could show a certificate that he was it would not at all follow that he would be received into the regiment of his time on account of this. Its not circumcision but what is associated with the school that counts. If we are to reform such teaching and take it over what form is the 'training in manhood' to take?

For my own part as things are in Bechuanaland - with the tide running in favour of the schools being abandoned - I am inclined to let well alone. I admit the benefits of circumcision, particularly from the point of view of cleanliness and helping to divert the minds of the young fellows from a part they are too prone to think about - but to announce at present that circumcision should be done wholesale would seem to advocate the abnoxious system of the past, for the Native mind would probably run on the idea that if it should be done they would prefer it to be done in their own way as in the past.

Again, if circumcision is to be general, then probably the system par excellence is the Jewish one of doing it about the eighth day. It is ^{9/10} certain that at that time there is ~~probably~~ no harmful effect psychologically. But it is disputed in medical circles at the present time that circumcision of boys and youths is without harm, in fact there are those who declare that the harm is great.

Obviously if the rite at the eighth day was adopted the 'training in manhood' would not go along with it.

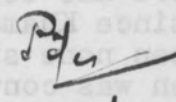
I think this is about all I wish to say at present. If it is possible and permissible I should be very glad to see the manuscript you have received.

I understand the typescript of the Hygiene Book - both in Tswana and English will shortly be submitted to you.

Could you enlighten as to the Finnish Mission? We are inclined to send something in response to the Appeal by the Christian Council, but two of the Sisters here have asked me if this Mission is sound doctrinally.

All good wishes to all.

Yours ever,



P.S. Very many thanks for books which have come to hand.
We are delighted.

