

The Crabtree Letters: A Fictionalized Legacy

24 short letters from Bugisu in the 1900s



Wasake E. Dickson

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Introduction

These letters are fictionalized but carefully grounded in the historical context of Reverend William Arthur Crabtree and his wife Ethel Bronwen Crabtree. The Crabtrees were missionaries with the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Crabtrees lived in Bugisu, Uganda, in the 1890s, the time period to which these letters pertain.

William was stationed in Mengo, then later posted to the eastern highlands of Uganda — the region known as Masaba land, home of the Bagisu people. There, the Crabtrees helped establish the mission station in Nabumali, and served in surrounding villages such as Busiu, Budadiri, Bumayoka, and Bufumbo, under the shadow of Mount Elgon.

Crabtree worked to translate the Bible into Lugisu (as well as Luganda and Lusoga).

More about them can be found in the Extended Historical Context at the end of this book.

As the grandson of a boy who once herded cattle in those hills, I write this with deep gratitude. That barefoot child — my grandfather — once ran toward the sound of a mission drum, drawn to the school planted by men like Rev. Crabtree. From that moment, a lineage of faith began. And now, generations later, I stand to preach the same Gospel that reached him under the shadow of Mount Elgon.

This is not just history. It is personal legacy.

And these letters — though imagined — are true in spirit. They reflect the sacrifice, faith, pain, and victory that came when the Gospel entered our land. May these pages remind us that God

still uses willing feet, and the Spirit still speaks — even through cracked lips and worn-out shoes.

These letters — written in their imagined voices — reflect what life might have been like: the emotional and spiritual toll of mission work, the cultural exchanges, the challenges of sickness and distance, the surprising joy of seeing hearts open to the Gospel, and the small domestic moments that still shaped history.

They are meant to serve as a devotional reflection, a historical remembrance, and a spiritual takeaway following the sermon *“How Beautiful Are the Feet.”*

Part 1: The letters of Mr. Crab Tree

Letter 1 – July 12, 1901

Nabumali Mission Station, Bugisu (Masaba land)

To Rev. Canon Alston, Church Missionary Society, London

My dear Canon,

I write from our small wooden house in Nabumali, perched on a ridge beneath the watchful shadow of Mount Elgon. It is hard to explain what the mist smells like here—something between burnt leaves and wet earth. We have arrived safely. But I will not pretend the journey was kind.

Ethel fell ill on the road from **Jinja**—some fever that even quinine could not chase. I feared I would lose her, and I prayed as I have never prayed. Psalm 46:1 became my only anchor:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

She is recovering now, thank the Lord. We were welcomed by some Bagisu elders, though others hung back, watching us with suspicion. A boy named Wamalwa stood apart from the group. He looked at our worn boots and asked, *“Have you walked from your God to us?”* “Yes,” I told him, “and He has walked with us.” That same night, I opened my Bible and reread the words that brought us here:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

— Matthew 28:19–20

Yours in the Master’s service,
Rev. William A. Crabtree



Letter 2 – July 29, 1901

Busiu Village, Bugisu

Canon,

We set out early yesterday to Busiu. The trail down the slope was slick from night rain. Our guide, Mafabi, warned of buffalo near the thicket, and sure enough, we heard something snorting beyond the brush. We sang hymns anyway.

We held our first open-air reading beside a termite mound. Twenty people came. One woman, a mother, brought her child who was visibly sick.

She whispered, *“I am tired of the gods who ask for blood. Can your Jesus help?”*

Acts 28:8: ‘Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him.’”

I knelt and prayed aloud. The Holy Spirit moved—I know He did.

That night, the child’s fever broke. The next morning, she said, ‘Tell me more about your Jesus.’

It also reminded me of Acts 28, where Paul healed on the island of Malta:

“And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick... Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him.”

— Acts 28:8

One step. One healing. One soul at a time.



Letter 3 – August 14, 1901

Mpumudde – Lower Ridge Camp

Canon - we have begun building a simple schoolhouse. At dawn, a group of boys from **Bumayoka** in **Bududa** came barefoot, carrying nothing but slates and sticks. One, Lutsekhe, said:

“I heard the drum in my sleep. I want to learn how your God speaks.”

I taught him John 3:16. He repeated it clumsily, but when he reached “*that He gave His only Son*”, he paused, and said:

“We sacrifice our goats. Your God sacrificed His Son?”

I was stunned silent. How could he understand so much, so quickly? I had no answer, only tears.”

A bond servant of the Lord Jesus.

Rev. William A. Crabtree



Letter 4 – August 18, 1901

Budadiri Hillside

An elder named Gidudu accused me: ‘You want our children to forget the ancestors.’

I answered, ‘I came to remind them of the One who made their ancestors.’

He stood without speaking, but as I turned to leave, I saw a torn page of the Book of Luke tucked into his belt.

The seed has been planted. We must water it in tears and prayer.

*“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please.”
— Isaiah 55:11*



Letter 5 – September 2, 1901

Nabumali Mission Station

Canon, I end this letter with tired hands and hopeful feet.

I look down at these boots—mud-caked, torn, bloodied at the heel—and I hear Isaiah again:

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news...”

— Isaiah 52:7

I don't know if we will live to see revival here. But I know the Gospel has touched this soil. When a people who once feared the drum now run toward it to hear Scripture... when a mother burns her charms to follow Christ... when a boy from Busiu prays in the Psalms in Lumasaba...

Then we know: He reigns here too.

Yours in Christ's service,
Rev. William A. Crabtree



Letter 6 – October 5, 1901

Nabumali Mission Station

Canon – as you know, we are not alone in this labor.

I received a letter from **Dr. John Cook** at **Mengo Hospital** — he writes of delivering babies by day, baptizing souls by night.

His words: *‘We deliver them into both this world and the next.’*

I think of **Robert Ashe**, who faced down **King Mwanga** and once said:

‘We are not planting a church — we are planting the Kingdom.’

And last month, we buried **Mr. Edward Skinner** from **Busoga** — just 29, taken by fever. His final words were **2 Timothy 4:7**:

‘I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.’

I stood today on the slopes of **Bumayoka**, and I heard again the prophet:

‘How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news...’ (Isaiah 52:7)

These are not just my feet — they are ours. All of us, carrying one message:

Your God reigns.



Letter 7 – January 10, 1902

Bufumbo Ridge

Canon,

we arrived in **Bufumbo** during the early clouds of morning, where talk of the upcoming **Imbalu season** fills every homestead. Here, circumcision is not hidden — it is celebrated. Young boys are led through villages with singing, drumming, and pride.

One elder, **Waninya**, stood beside me and said:

‘We circumcise to make our boys men. It is our way. But you speak of another way. Do the people of your book also cut the skin?’

I turned to **Genesis 17** and read:

‘Every male among you shall be circumcised... and it shall be a sign of the covenant... Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised... and all the men of his house.’

Waninya was silent for a while. Then he said: *‘Then maybe your God is not so foreign after all.’*

I explained — not for manhood, but for **covenant**. Not to earn favor, but to reflect it.

I do not know if a conversion has begun — but **a curiosity has**.

We are finding bridges, Canon. And perhaps the Lord has already laid the stepping stones.”



Letter 8 – February 15, 1902

Nabumali Mission Station, Bugisu (Masaba land)

To Rev. Canon Alston, Church Missionary Society, London

My dear Canon,

The rains have returned. The paths to **Busiu** are slippery again, and the termites have begun feasting on the support beams of the schoolhouse. Yet even as I sit under a leaky thatch roof, I feel compelled to write.

This morning, a mother arrived carrying a boy no older than six. His chest was marked with **burn scars**, and the child barely made a sound. She said, “I have tried the herbs. I have burned incense. I gave blood at the cave... But he grows weaker. Can your Jesus help?”

Canon, her eyes were heavy with fear, but I saw a flicker of hope when I answered, “Yes. And He does not ask for blood — He gave His.”

We laid the boy on a mat, anointed him with oil, and prayed. I read aloud from **Mark 9**, the story of the boy the disciples could not heal. When I reached Jesus’ words —

“This kind can only come out by prayer...” —

her lips moved with mine. That evening, she returned. The fever had broken. The child had eaten.

Her voice trembled as she said, “Then your Jesus is stronger than our gods.”

I could only nod. Because He is.

These are not tales from ancient scrolls — they are happening here, among the banana groves and termite-bitten floors.

Pray for us. The fear is great. But **the Light is greater still.**

Yours under His mercy,

Rev. William A. Crabtree



Letter 9 – April 3, 1902

Near Sironko River, Bugisu (Masaba land)

To Rev. Canon Alston, CMS London

My dear Canon,

I write this letter seated on a rock beside the **river near Sironko**, where just hours ago, I witnessed something I scarcely have words for.

We baptized **seven young men** today as well as their diviner priest! These boys had once all been attendants to this local medium called “Umusamize” or sometimes “Omulumbozi” in their language. He was responsible for carrying charms, preparing sacrifices, and summoning spirits. They came to us quietly at first, drawn by whispers that a **greater name** had come to the hills.

One of them, a boy named **Nagimesi**, spoke first. His voice trembled as he said,

“This Jesus... He is not afraid of our spirits. I want to follow Him.”

The others nodded. One even brought his old charm bag, still smeared with goat’s blood, and laid it at my feet.

We read from **Acts 19** —

“And many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them... So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.” — Acts 19:19–20

Then we led them down into the water.

Canon, I will not forget the sound of the current, the light breaking through the branches of a towering **mutuba tree** — one of the wild figs that line the banks here. The boys rose from

the river with faces lit not just by sunlight, but by something deeper — freedom.

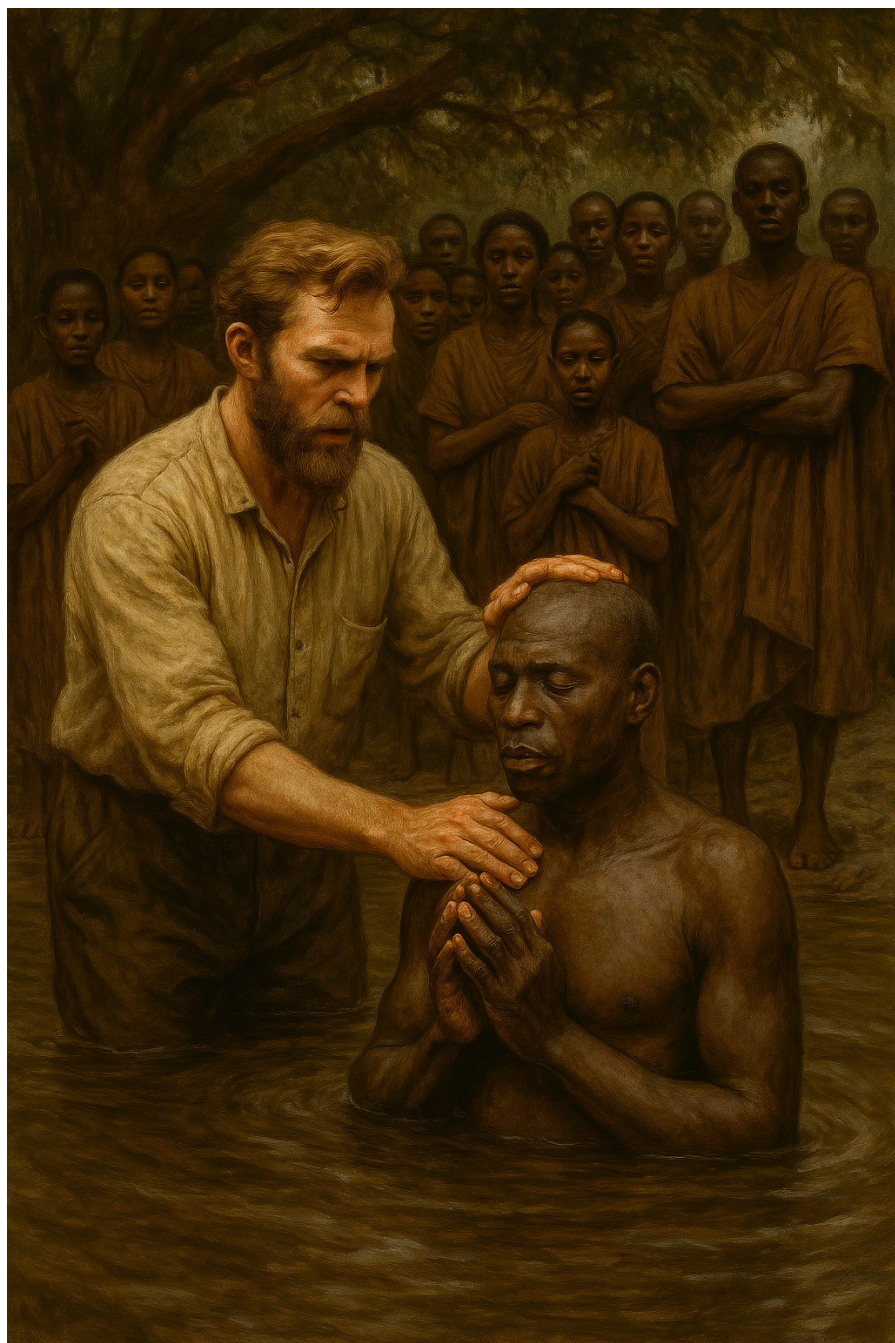
When they returned to the village, they were not mocked. One mother wept and said, “My son was once lost in the spirits. Now, he sings.”

I later heard from a teacher in **Bumayoka** that similar things are beginning there too — songs in the classrooms, prayers among the mothers. And in **Mutufu**, I am told the children are now asking for Scripture to be read before school.

We are seeing fire, Canon — not of fear, but of the Spirit.

Pray that it spreads.

Your brother in the field,
Rev. William A. Crabtree



Letter 10 – May 7, 1902

Nabumali Mission Station, Bugisu (Masaba land)

To Rev. Canon Alston, Church Missionary Society, London

My dear Canon,

The days grow longer, and the weight of our task presses heavily upon me. As I sit at my modest desk, the flickering lantern casts shadows on the walls, mirroring the complexities we face in translating the Scriptures into **Lumasaba**.

Our endeavor to convey the essence of the **Holy Spirit** has proven particularly challenging. The people here are well-acquainted with spirits—beings that evoke fear and demand appeasement. Introducing them to the concept of the **Holy Spirit**, a source of comfort and guidance, requires delicate articulation.

After much prayer and consultation with local elders, we have adopted the term "**Omwoyo Omutukuvu**." "Omwoyo" signifies spirit, and "Omutukuvu" denotes holiness or purity. Yet, despite this translation, the connotations differ. Here, spirits are often associated with malevolence and trepidation. To present the **Holy Spirit** as a benevolent presence necessitates not just linguistic translation but a transformation of understanding.

I often think of **Pilkington**, whose tireless work in translating the Luganda Bible gave generations of Baganda access to the living Word. He once wrote that each verse was like "pulling water from a deep well with a frayed rope." That's how I feel now — tugging gently, hoping the rope holds.

In our recent gatherings, I have endeavored to illustrate this by recounting the words of our Lord in **John 14:26**:

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

I share stories of peace, of guidance, of the unseen hand that leads us toward righteousness. Slowly, I observe the light of comprehension dawning in their eyes, as they begin to grasp the profound difference between the spirits they have known and the **Omwoyo Omutukuvu** we introduce.

Canon, the path of translation is fraught with obstacles, not merely of language but of culture and perception. Yet, I remain steadfast in the belief that the Word of God, once rooted in the hearts of the **Bagisu**, will flourish and bear fruit in ways we can scarcely imagine.

Please convey my warm regards to the brethren in London. Your prayers sustain us more than words can express.

Yours faithfully in Christ,
Rev. William A. Crabtree



Letter 11- July 18, 1902

Nabumali Mission, Bugisu (Masaba land)

To Rev. Canon Alston, CMS London

My dear Canon,

Tonight, as I walked through the compound at dusk, I saw a line of children — books in hand — reciting their lessons aloud. The schoolhouse walls are thin, yet the words seem to cling to them like honey.

One of the boys, a quiet lad named **Wafana**, stopped me. He said,

“Teacher, when I grow up, can I also teach others what God has said?”

My throat caught. “Yes,” I told him, “and you’ll do it better than I ever could.”

Canon, I once believed my task was to preach — to plant churches and baptize. But now I see: my calling is to sow teachers, to ignite futures, to lay a foundation I may never see finished.

This week I rode with one of our younger teachers to **Nyondo**, where a group of girls now sing Psalm 121 in Masaba each morning before class. Their teacher, Simon, studied under one of the early CMS converts at **Buwalasi**. He told me, “We no longer wait for missionaries — we have become the messengers.”

And I recently received a letter from a young teacher working in **Bugema**, where a new chapel school is being established. He wrote: “The children here are eager. They read by lantern light

and ask for more.” What a thought — a hunger for Scripture in places we have yet to step foot.

I think often of **Apolo Kivebulaya**, now preaching in Toro. Here is a man, once a warrior, now a humble servant of Christ — taking the Gospel into places I may never reach. Canon, that is the vision I carry now. That men like Apolo will rise in Masaba. That our legacy will not be buildings, but believers who go farther than we could ever walk.

There is a sapling behind the chapel we planted last month. I told the children, “One day you’ll sit under its shade and tell your children how the Word came to these hills.”

Isaiah 61:3 comes to mind:

“They shall be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord, for the display of His splendor.”

There are changes coming to this land — new flags, new roads, new rulers. But the truest change is quieter. It’s the boy who picks up his Bible. The girl who hums the Psalms in her sleep. The village elder who now brings millet to the chapel instead of the shrine.

We may not be remembered, Canon. But He will. And that is enough.

Yours in the vineyard,
Rev. William A. Crabtree



Letter 12- August 12, 1902

Mpumudde, Bugisu (Masaba land)

To Rev. Canon Alston, CMS London

My dear Canon,

The Gospel does not arrive uncontested.

Yesterday, while visiting **Mpumudde**, I was confronted by a local diviner named **Mungoma**. He had heard that we now discourage the use of charms and ancestral offerings in the school compound. He raised his carved staff and declared:

“You bring light that blinds our gods. The children forget the voices of the caves.”

His words reminded me instantly of **Paul’s rebuke to Elymas (Bar-Jesus) in Acts 13:10**:

“You son of the devil... will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?”

Canon, we are not battling flesh. This is **a spiritual contest** — not for lands or crowns, but for hearts and truth.

And still, the Light shines.

That same afternoon, a woman named **Namono** brought a small charm bag — wrapped in banana fiber and dyed red with goat’s blood — and laid it at the foot of the altar in our small chapel. She whispered,

“I’m tired of fearing everything. Jesus is enough.”

Later that night, I heard her humming a verse from **Psalms 27**:

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”

I've also heard word from **Sironko** that a group of young believers now meets every Friday under a tree near the ridge to sing, read, and pray. And in **Mutufu**, a widowed grandmother has begun teaching neighborhood children how to recite the Beatitudes — line by line, as her memory allows.

Even in **Bugema**, the chapel is said to be overflowing on Sundays, with boys sitting on stones and window sills just to hear the Gospel. And the schoolteacher in **Buwalasi** wrote me this week: "We no longer measure revival by numbers — but by how many fathers now pray with their sons."

Yes, there are changes coming to this land. New maps are being drawn. Flags are flying where shrines once stood. But the most enduring change is not colonial. It is eternal.

We are not planting a kingdom of men — we are planting the Kingdom of God.

Pray for strength, Canon. The fire is spreading.

Yours under the cross,

Rev. William A. Crabtree



Part 2: The Letters of Mrs. Ethel Bronwen Crabtree

Letter 1 – July 14, 1901

Nabumali Mission Station, Eastern Uganda. To her sister Margaret, Yorkshire

Dearest Margaret,

The sun rose slowly this morning behind the ridge of **Mount Elgon**, casting gold through the fog. It rained last night—hard. The roof dripped onto our writing table, and I had to move the bedding from the wall to keep it dry. Everything smells of earth and charcoal.

William left before dawn to walk to **Bufumbo**, barefoot except for his dusty boots and carrying nothing but a Masaba Bible and a worn satchel. He went to speak to a local chief about building a small chapel.

I stayed to tend the little school. We had **seventeen children today**—some barefoot, some with sores. One boy, **Nanguli**, recited John 1:1 in Lumasaba. The Word was here, in their language, on their lips.

We are not only building churches, Margaret. We are teaching children to read *God's voice* for themselves.



Letter 2 – July 29, 1901

Bumayoka Village

Maggie - today, a mother brought her child to me. His eyes were sunken, and he cried as if the wind itself pained him.

She whispered:

“If the spirits are not given blood, they will take him.”

I held her trembling hands and said, “There is One who gave His blood already, once for all.”

We read together from **Hebrews 10:10**:

“We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

That night, the fever broke. The next morning, she brought millet as thanks—not to the spirits, but to us.



Letter 3 – August 10, 1901

Nabumali – Midweek Reflections

My dearest Margaret - this morning I washed my feet in a small basin outside the hut. They are cracked and swollen from the long walks. A young girl named **Khasaka** came over and looked down at them. She asked, innocently:

“Mama Etel, why are your feet so ugly?”

I laughed, but inside, I wept. Because that is what Isaiah says:

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news...” — Isaiah 52:7

I do not know if my feet are beautiful, but I hope the **message they carry** is.



Letter 4 – August 22, 1901

Busiu Village

We visited Busiu yesterday. The journey was steep—my skirts caught on thorns, and my shoes nearly gave way. But we were welcomed with song.

A grandmother there told me: “When your people first came, I hid. I thought your Jesus would destroy our ancestors. But now, I see. He gives us back our children.”

Her son, once a drunkard and fighter, now teaches the Psalms to others. We sat beneath a mango tree and sang together:

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...” — Psalm 23:1

I wept openly. Not out of sorrow, but gratitude. He is building something here.



Letter 5 – September 10, 1901

Nabumali Mission – Quiet Evening

Dearest Margaret,

The sun sets in amber behind the hills. William is still out, preaching in **Budadiri**, and I am here with only the sounds of frogs and the distant beat of the talking drum.

We are tired. So tired. But there is joy.

“Do not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap...” — Galatians 6:9

If you could see their faces—the way their eyes light up when they hear Jesus speak Lumasaaba. One girl told me:

“I did not know your God could speak our language.”

But of course He does. Didn't He come to walk among us?

Even in Nabumali, He walks still.

With all my love,

Ethel



Letter 6 – October 11, 1901

Nabumali, To her sister Margaret, Yorkshire

My dearest Margaret,

Tonight the winds have returned — thundering down from Elgon like a wild choir. I sat by the fire holding Mary, who coughed again most of the night. I fear it may be malaria, though I pray it's only the cold. The quinine is nearly gone, and the nearest doctor is days away.

I held her chest and whispered over her sleeping body,

“He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge...”

— Psalm 91:4

But if I'm honest, sister, I was trembling too. Not just for her, but for me.

For what happens if she worsens? For how long I must stay brave? For what it means to raise children at the edge of the known world?

William is so strong. So unwavering. But even he leans more heavily on the cane these days. The hills are steep. The path is lonely.

We laugh when we can — usually over burnt corn meal — which they call “posho” or the way Mary insists the word “angel” is pronounced “enjira.”

But there are also nights like this one.

Nights when I miss the bell of St. John's, the scent of Yorkshire fog, and the certainty that tea would always be warm and the doctor just down the lane.

And yet — even as I write this — I hear the distant rhythm of the talking drum from **Busiu**. I know William is teaching.
I know a boy is learning to write his name.
I know a girl is singing “*Jesus, lover of my soul*” in lugisu.
I know the Kingdom is coming.

So I will not be afraid.

*“Do not fear, for I am with you;
Do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”
— Isaiah 41:10*

Hold us in your prayers, dear sister.
We are tired — but not defeated.
Lonely — but not alone.
Homesick — but home-bound for heaven.

With all my love,
Ethel



Letter 7 – October 18, 1901

Nabumali Mission

To her sister Margaret, Yorkshire

My dearest Margaret,

Life is not easy. The mosquitoes sing their hymns each night, and the frogs often drown out our own.

Mary still battles fevers, though she is brave. She shares her boiled sweets with the schoolchildren and smiles like she's one of the teachers.

There are days I miss St. Andrew's bells, a warm fire, and proper tea. But there are also days the Spirit visits like rain.

Last week, **Nambuya**, a widow long shunned by her clan, came to our service. We prayed over her trembling hands, and that night she slept — peacefully — for the first time in months.

Now she sweeps the schoolyard and hums 'Rock of Ages' as she works.

In the evenings, William reads the Psalms aloud while the mountains turn blue. And I remember:

*'I lift up my eyes to the hills... My help comes from the Lord.' —
Psalm 121:1–2*

That is enough for me.

With all my love,

Ethel



Letter 8 – November 4, 1901

***Nabumali Mission Station, Bugisu To her sister Margaret,
Yorkshire***

My dearest Maggie,

It's just past sunset here, and the hills are wrapped in that usual soft mist that makes everything seem both distant and near.

William has gone to teach in **Busiu**, and Mary has finally fallen asleep after a lingering cough kept her up half the night. I have a quiet moment to write, and I want to tell you about something that has been stirring in me these last few days.

We have been working on translating the Scriptures — not just reading them, but finding words that speak truly to the hearts here. And oh Maggie, it's no easy thing.

The people here are well acquainted with **spirits**. They speak of them often — spirits in the caves, spirits in the rivers, spirits that whisper at night. But when I tried to explain about the **Holy Spirit**, they looked at me with eyes full of confusion and fear. William worked with the elders a few months ago to translate the Holy Spirit, but it is still difficult for many to understand Him.

One little girl, **Nafula**, asked me quietly after class:

“Mama Etel, is your Holy Spirit like the one that makes people sick?”

I sat down beside her, took her hand, and said,

“No, love. The **Omwoyo Omutukuvu** is different. He brings peace, not fear. He protects, not harms. He speaks only truth.”

We practiced saying it in **Lumasaba** together — *Omwoyo... Omutukuvu* — and I told her how Jesus called Him the **Helper**, the one who would never leave us.

It reminded me of **John 14:26**:

“The Helper, the Holy Spirit... will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

Nafula smiled, and whispered, *“Then maybe I will not be afraid tonight.”*

Maggie, that is what we are here for. Not just to teach from books — but to help them sleep without fear, to walk without dread, and to know they are not alone.

The sun is nearly gone now, and the frogs have begun their usual concert. I hear Mary turning in her sleep, and I must go.

Pray for us — for the words we choose, and for the hearts that will hear them.

All my love,
Ethel



Letter 9 – November 9, 1901

Nabumali Mission Station, Bugisu. To her sister Margaret, Yorkshire

My dear Maggie,

The sun is setting now behind the hills, casting everything in a gold so soft it almost makes the hardships here seem like a dream. But I mustn't pretend it is all beauty. Today, I had to burn two of Mary's dresses — the termites had eaten through the hems, and the mould would not come out.

I sometimes wonder what people think when they hear "missionary wife." They imagine polished tables and polite luncheons, perhaps. But I am more often found boiling water over a charcoal fire, chasing snakes from the chicken coop, or weeping beside another woman whose baby didn't make it through the fever.

Today, I received a letter from **Annie Cook**, wife of **Dr. John Cook** in Mengo. She wrote:

"We buried a woman last week. She was only twenty-five. I washed the body myself. The other women were afraid to touch it. But I sang as I worked — 'What a Friend We Have in Jesus.'"

I read her words again and again. Because, Maggie, sometimes we women must carry a faith that bleeds quietly.

We're the ones who stay behind when our husbands ride out into the hills. We soothe the children when the drums beat in the dark. We plant Scripture in small hearts long before they're ready to read.

There is a woman here — **Namakoye**. Her husband forbade her from attending our classes. But still, she comes — barefoot, early, and always with a half smile. She listens from behind the

schoolhouse. Last week, I heard her whispering the Lord's Prayer in the Masaba language.

I don't know how long it will take for her husband to notice. Or approve. But I know this:

"A bruised reed He will not break." — Isaiah 42:3

That verse is for women like Annie. And Namakoye. And maybe for me, too.

With all my love,

Ethel



Letter 10 – November 16, 1901

Nabumali School Compound, Bugisu. To her sister Margaret, Yorkshire

My dearest Maggie,

Tonight, I am writing by candlelight — the lamp oil has run low, and the new shipment hasn't yet arrived from **Mbale**. Mary is asleep beside me, one arm tucked under her chin, the other holding the small doll you sent. She calls it "Nankya," after a classmate from nearby **Buganda** who shares her boiled sweets and sings the loudest in devotions.

There's something I've been learning lately — or perhaps relearning. It is this: rest is holy. Not the kind of rest that comes from sleep (though I crave that too), but the kind that comes from knowing you're in the center of His will, even when everything around you seems uncertain.

The compound is quiet now. The children have gone, the chickens are roosting, and William is still out visiting a family in **Bufumbo**. I sat outside for a while tonight — alone on the veranda. The hills were layered in shadow, and the stars blinked out like oil lamps in reverse.

And I found myself thinking of **Psalm 4:8**:

"In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."

Sometimes, safety is not a place. It is a Person.

Maggie, there are days I feel tired down to the marrow of my bones. But there are also moments like this — quiet, still, unshaken — when I know that He sees me. And that is enough.

Please kiss the children for me. And tell Father I still remember
the smell of his boots by the fireplace and the sound of his voice
at vespers.

With all my love,

Ethel



Letter 11- November 20, 1901

Nabumali Mission House. To her sister Margaret, Yorkshire

My dear Maggie,

Little **Mary** stood up in chapel today and led a hymn — in Masaba. She sang “*Yesu Omutufu*” (Jesus is true) with such clarity and sweetness that even the older girls wept. I turned away to hide my tears.

She is only nine, but I see in her the soft beginning of a ministry — not from a pulpit, but from the heart of a child who knows what it is to share sweets and Scripture with equal joy. Perhaps that is the purest kind of evangelism.

There are others too. **Namakoye’s** daughter, barely eight, recited **Psalms 23** from memory during our class. I asked how she learned it and she said,

“Mama prays it when Daddy is angry.”

Sometimes I worry that the change is too slow — one child, one verse, one heart. But maybe that is exactly how the Kingdom grows.

“The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed...” — Matthew 13:31

I had a letter this week from **Jane Cook** in **Buwalasi** — she said one of her older girls now teaches the village women by candlelight. And in **Bugema**, they’ve started what she calls “quiet circles” — mothers gathering after dusk to pray for their husbands.

Even here in **Nyondo**, I hear the girls now begin every lesson by saying: “*The Lord is my Shepherd...*”

Tell Father that Mary still carries the little Bible he sent, the one with the cracked red leather. She says it smells like home.

All my love from the hills,

Ethel



Letter 12- November 30, 1901

Nabumali Veranda, Bugisu

To her sister Margaret, Yorkshire

My dear Maggie,

The **mango tree** outside the school has begun to bloom again. Its branches are heavy with green hope. I take it as a benediction — a silent “well done” from the Lord, whispered through leaves.

William is asleep inside. **Mary** lies curled beside him, her little hand still holding the cloth doll you made. The frogs have begun their usual noisy concert, and I am writing this by candlelight with a cup of boiled tea gone cold.

The other day, I stood alone on the veranda and watched the hills sink into shadow. For a moment, I was overwhelmed — not with sorrow, but with something else. Something holy.

I thought: Maybe this land is no longer foreign to me. Maybe, by grace, it is home.

There are changes coming here. I hear murmurs of **governors**, of **new laws**, and **English officers** with surveys and maps. But Maggie, the deepest change is in the songs sung by girls on their way to fetch water. It's in the way mothers now pray over their children instead of burning herbs. That is the change I care about.

Annie Cook in **Buwalasi** wrote last week that her neighbour's daughter has started a prayer group under the jackfruit tree. And in **Mutufu**, a widow has been leading women through the Gospel of Luke every Sunday afternoon, sitting on reed mats with borrowed Bibles.

I read again today a passage from **Jane Elizabeth Chadwick's journal** — she wrote, *"A woman's faith may be quiet, but it need not be small."* I often think of her when I feel invisible here — when my lessons feel fruitless or my words are too tired to carry.

Even the girls in **Sironko** are learning to write out the Psalms by hand, copying them with care so they can teach their younger siblings.

As I sat in the stillness, these words came to mind — like a soft cloak:

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." — **Psalms 23:6**

If I never see home again, let it be said that **I dwelt in His house**, even here, even now.

With quiet hope,
Ethel



Conclusion – The Sound of Beautiful Feet

These letters, though imagined, are woven with the threads of real lives, real places, and real faith. They speak of hills climbed in worn boots, of malaria and mango trees, of babies lost and baptisms gained — of a Kingdom quietly conquering fear.

I do not know where William and Ethel Crabtree are buried. There may be no stone that bears their name in the villages of Nabumali, Busiu, or Budadiri. But I know this:

Their feet walked there.

Their prayers rose from those ridges.

Their words — in Lumasaba and English — still echo in hearts and hymns.

And I, a preacher generations later, am the fruit of those labors.

For one day, a barefoot boy, herding cattle in the hills of Tululu, heard the beat of a mission drum. He ran toward it. He found a school. He found a Bible. He found a God who walked.

And now, I preach that same Jesus.

The Gospel does not need fame. It needs faithful feet. Feet that climb. Feet that stay. Feet that bleed and blister and still carry the Good News.

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news...” — Isaiah 52:7

So now, may we take our place in this legacy.

May **your feet** be beautiful.

Not because they are flawless — but because they follow Jesus.

Extended Historical Context: The Crabtrees' Missionary Endeavors

The Real Crabtrees

Reverend William Arthur Crabtree (c. 1868–1945) was a dedicated missionary affiliated with the Church Missionary Society (CMS). His educational journey took him through St. Peter's School in York, King's School in Canterbury, and later St. Catharine's College and Ridley Hall in Cambridge, where he earned his Bachelor of Arts in 1889. In 1890, he trained at the Church Missionary College, marking the beginning of his lifelong commitment to missionary work.

In 1891, Crabtree embarked on his first mission to Frere Town as part of the East Equatorial Africa Mission. His subsequent years were marked by extensive service across Uganda:

- Mengo (1892): Engaged in foundational missionary activities.
- Kyagwe (1893): Continued his evangelical work.
- Kavirondo and Busoga (1894–1897): Expanded his outreach efforts.
- Mengo (1898): Returned to further consolidate the mission's presence.
- Gayaza (1899–1900): Focused on community building and spiritual guidance.
- Masaba Kavirondo (1901–1903): Undertook significant linguistic and evangelical projects.

A notable aspect of Crabtree's legacy is his contribution to linguistics. Recognizing the importance of scripture accessibility, he collaborated with fellow missionary Frank Rowling between 1896 and 1905 to translate three of the four Gospels into the

Soga language. Additionally, Crabtree played a pivotal role in transcribing the Gisu (Masaba) language, facilitating its written form and translating the Gospels to serve the local communities better.

In 1898, William married Ethel Bronwen Poole. While historical records about Ethel are limited, it's evident that missionary wives like her were instrumental in the success of missions, often overseeing educational initiatives, healthcare, and community engagement. The fictionalized letters in this collection aim to illuminate and honor the invaluable yet often unrecorded contributions of such women.

The letters also introduce Mary Crabtree, the young daughter of William and Ethel. While she does not appear in historical records, her role in the fictionalized letters reflects the often-unseen reality of missionary children — growing up between worlds, shaped by both Scripture and the soil. Her tender scenes with the doll “Nankya” and her hymn-singing in Lumasaaba give voice to the quiet spiritual growth that missions left in their wake.

Reverend William Arthur Crabtree's legacy is notably preserved at Nabumali High School in Uganda. Established in 1900 by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the school moved to its current location in 1912. In honor of its early leaders, several dormitories were named after prominent figures, including Crabtree, Banks, and Aggrey. This naming serves as a lasting tribute to Rev. Crabtree's contributions to education and missionary work in the region.

After resigning from the CMS in 1905, Crabtree continued his spiritual journey as a local clergyman within the Anglican Church until his passing in St. Dennis, Cornwall, in 1945.

Further Reading and Archival Resources

For readers interested in delving deeper into the Crabtrees' lives and the broader context of missionary work in Uganda, the following resources are invaluable:

- Church Missionary Society Archives: Housed at the University of Birmingham, these archives contain personal papers of Rev. William Arthur Crabtree, including diaries, photographs, and maps detailing his missionary journeys.
- School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Library: This collection offers materials related to Crabtree's linguistic research, notably his work on Bantu languages and the Luganda grammar.
- "Elements of Luganda Grammar" by William Arthur Crabtree: Published in 1902, this work provides insights into Crabtree's linguistic endeavors and is available for purchase through various outlets.

About The Author



In 2017, Dickson Wasake had a radical encounter with the Lord Jesus. In holy fear, he understood this: *“What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world and lose their soul?” Matthew 16: 26.* So, he got baptized a second time.

He soon heard the Lord call: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” He responded, “Here I am, send me!”

Thus, this Dickson Wasake became a bondservant of the Lord.

He is the Senior Pastor of www.shaweleroad.com, whose name originates from his mother tongue, a Lugisu word meaning “it is finished” or “belonging to God.” This ministry works to further the gospel and hosts an annual Bible Challenge Class where students read the entire Bible in one year. Since 2022, more than 800 students have joined the class, with many completing the Bible for the first time, after in some cases trying for eight years or more.

Dickson is also the Senior Pastor of www.ourtestimony.org, a ministry on a God-given mission to collect and verify over 50,000 testimonies as well as offer 100,000 prayers to God.

Additionally, Dickson is a seasoned business leader with over 20 years of experience in audit, accounting, and advisory services, including roles at global accounting firms PwC, Deloitte, and Baker Tilly. He is a former audit partner (Baker Tilly CI). He has

worked with businesses of all sizes, from Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMBs) to listed multinationals. His clients have included World Bank/IDB and UN-funded projects, as well as franchises for Coca-Cola and Unilever, a central bank, a \$1 billion crypto asset manager, an \$800 billion asset manager, and a \$1.3 trillion insurer.

Dickson is a poet who has written over 7 books and more than 50 thought leadership articles.

Dickson has travelled to over 30 countries and spent extended time in the Bahamas, the UK (including Jersey), and Canada.

He lives in Illinois, USA, with his wife Brenda and children, who have been cajoling him to get a dog, a cat, a parrot, or any other pet. Thus far, he has only allowed them to walk a goldfish.

If you want to receive Jesus as the author did, the same God whom the Crabtrees preached, please see ***Appendix I.***

Appendix I: Receiving Jesus

Choosing to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior is one of the most important decisions you will ever make.

It is not enough to accumulate knowledge about God. This knowledge has got to move past your head to your heart. It starts when you feel a discomfort about your present condition of sin, your fear of mortality/death, your quest for peace, or whatever inner discomfort you feel, and it drives you to search for God. This search may initially be relaxed, but eventually, it will burn in your heart (hence, you will, for example, search online and find a Christian website). Soon, the conviction of the Lord over your situation will drive you to the point where you ask yourself the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

If you find yourself asking this question, praise God because that is God the Holy Spirit (Omwoyo Omutukuvu) at work for no one can ask themselves such a question, unless God himself is drawing them in – BUT while the getting saved and drawing you in is indeed the work of the LORD you have a decision to make - to come. He does the drawing and the leading, you decide to follow. This is the beauty of free will. This decision involves you choosing to give up your life in exchange for God's life breath. I too had to take that LEAP of FAITH.

What does it mean to receive Jesus or to “get saved”

It means the following as explained from the Bible:

If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation... For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Romans 10:9-10-13

By His grace, God has already done everything to provide salvation. Your part is simply to believe and receive with a childlike act of faith. Jesus says: "I am the way, the truth and the life". In other words, you must believe he is the ONLY WAY to get to God in heaven (John 14: 6) for there is no other name by which people may be saved (Acts 4:12). He also says: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Mark 2: 17 (NIV).

If you believe these things, you can ask the Lord to come into your life, pray this prayer:

God of Heaven, I have come to understand that my sins have separated me from you, but you have created a way for me to receive salvation through your son Jesus. Forgive me my sins, oh Lord.

Jesus, I confess that You are my Lord and Savior. I believe in my heart that God raised You from the dead. By faith in Your Word, I receive salvation now.

Thank you for saving me! Amen!

If you prayed that prayer and meant it from your heart, you are now a new creation; the old has passed away, and all things are new, for all things are of God. The very moment you commit your life to Jesus Christ, the truth of His Word instantly comes to pass in your spirit. We would like to rejoice with you and help you understand more fully what has taken place in your life.

Contact me and share your testimony with me at dwasake@ourtestimony.org. I will also offer you a gift to help you begin your journey of faith.

Alternatively, visit our website:

https://ourtestimony.org/receive_jesus

Lord Jesus come, Maranatha!