

Letter to Joseph D. Hooker, 9 December 1861

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[0001]

River Shire 9th Dec^r 1861

Private

My Dear D^r Hooker

Many thanks for your kind letter by the Pioneer. We had just returned from the Makololo country & contemplated a long run up the Rovuma so I thought it would be as well to wait before answering you till I had something to write about. D^r Kirk wished to go home as by the Victoria fall journey he had pretty well worked up the botany of a large section of the country but when he heard of a new steamer and a new field up Rovuma he was willing enough to stay - We failed at the Rovuma chiefly because the new vessel is too deep - then came round to the Shire intending to examine the Rovuma from above downwards and have again failed. We carried a boat past the cataracts then sailed about 60 miles up the Upper Shire -

[0002]

and some 225 up the Lake. We found it very deep - and from 20 to 50 miles broad the length is that above indicated though we say only over 200 miles. The country around is all highland or mountainous and sudden storms come down which raise seas in which no open boat could live. We were there during the Equinoctial gales and it would have been foolhardiness to have crossed to the Eastern shore at that period. When we came to near the North end, or where the people go round it, no food was to be had, and wherever we went we saw skeletons and putrid bodies of the slain the handiwork

of a tribe of Zulus called Mazita or
 Mazite. I met seven of them and they
 were as much afraid of me as I ought
 to have been of them. they would not
 take me to their chief. the country was
 depopulated so we were obliged to return
 and be content with the most contradictory
 reports of Rovuma ever heard. One man
 of intelligence and with no motive we
 [0003]
 could imagine for deception, would
 assert positively that we could sail out
 of the Lake into the river - Another would
 say we must lift it [(the boat)] a mile - another
 fifty miles - a fourth a hundred &
 in one point alone did all agree it was
 "a very large river". The reason why
 we want an outlet there is the Portuguese
 follow us everywhere and introduce
 slaving. When we took the bishop
 up to a spot about 15 miles south
 of Zomba we met Portuguese slavers
 returning from near that mountain
 with lots of captives - we took them &
 gave them over to the bishop to be
 operated on by His Reverence secund-
 em Artem high Churchii. If you are high church you had better rub out that
 bit of profanity! We have
 plenty of cotton for the collecting but
 no Englishman will submit to
 Portuguese officials. We shall be
 engaged for the best part of a year
 in carrying a steamer past the
 cataracts. We expect her soon and
 the parts to be screwed together.
 [0004]

Kirk will tell you about the palm oil nut
 found on the Lake. It is not half the size of that
 on the West coast & is not used for anything
 It cannot be of any value for they collect
 an insect not bigger than our smallest
 gnat and boil them into cakes which are
 used as a relish with other food. I expect
 some of the real nut from Loanda for planting.

I am very glad to hear that you are
 going to bring out a Genera Plantarum
 we have often talked about & felt
 angry that you did not come out more
 For the sake of your family you ought to

be more of a popularity hunter - "Bosh"
[you say] "Teach your grand mother" &c. &c. &c. We think
before hand how all your friends would
feel if any of the Nobodies should be
lifted over your head. Be as angry as
you like with me I repeat you ought
to make yourself more known. Could
you not do something in the popular
line with your Museum. there is nothing
mean in it - see how Playfair and
Sir Roderick get on. It is all fair
and above board.

[0005]

We have been sadly vexed by Rae
and the boxes five of which were lately
seen at Mozambique without any
addresses. He was entrusted to address
them to your father when he should
get paint. Some boxes had " D^r Kirk"
on the corner. M^r Burrup the missi-
onary who saw them added " England"
a wide direction enough. One box
with no address contained birds
and belongs to my brother. I have
been bothered enough by my com-
panions, but did not expect Rae
to act this way. If all had been
like Kirk I should have had smooth
sailing.

D^r Meller is very industrious
but many of his specimens will
be duplicates of Kirk's. I feel
annoyed because many of the
plants from Zomba were the
same as Welwitsch got on the
[0006]

highlands of Angola. Ours were
collected long ago and but for Rae's
conduct would have been registered
first

Please present my kindest
regards to M^{rs} Hooker, and to your
father. My wife is I believe now
on her way out here after a three
years unexpected separation. Has
your eldest boy taken to anything
My hopeful ran away from
his tutor lately. They were trying

to cram him [with Latin & Greek] if I understand
rightly, and thrashing was threatened
so off he went. Our friend Playfair
helped at this juncture & he is now
at a school at St Andrews. It is
comforting to think how much
better we were when we were
young!! David Livingstone