

Letter to John Murray III, 1 November 1859

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

River Shire- 1st November
1859

My Dear M^r Murray

Never a blessed word
have we got from any of our
friends since we left England
but we hear that there is a mail
for us at Senna and a surfeit
of newspapers. I am therefore
preparing to yield myself utterly
to the feast by writing to my
friends. and having forgotten
the address of M^r Elwes of the
Quarterly I beg to entrust my
letter to him to you.

We have just traced this river
up to its source in Lake Nyassa
[0002]
and we had a long tramp of 250
miles on foot through a very fine
well watered mountainous country
and it being the hot season of the
year when we travelled we had just
as much foot work as is good
for Europeans at a dose. We
could not explore Nyassa as we
had left M^r Macgregor Laird's
sham vessel in a sinking state.
Funnel - Furnace - Deck and Bottom
all went honeycombed after only
twelve months wear - £1200 for 12 months
was fairish with the whine of "doing it
all for the good of the cause." Lake
Nyassa is large if one may judge
from the swell when there is no wind
and the Shire is given off constantly
without causing any alteration in
the height of the Lake. The Shire is from
[0003]

80 to 150 yards wide - ten or 12 feet deep
has a two & a half knot current, yet
never varies more than 2 or 3 feet
from wet to dry season. there are
only 33 miles of cataracts in it and
a common road could without difficulty
be made past them. The country
beyond is elevated and lies in three terraces - of 1200 feet - 2000ft and
3000 feet high respectively. On the last
rises the lofty mountain Zomba
which we ascended and found to be
between 7000 & 8000 feet high. Yet
cultivated on the top. the country
is well adapted for cotton and
it is now grown pretty extensively
the terraces have great numbers
of running rills of deliciously cool
water and they present changes of
climate within a few miles of each other
[0004]

It was delightfully cool on the third
terrace even in the hottest period of the
year and on Zomba it was cold.

A remarkably white lichen may have
deceived those who saw some white
rocks in the North. I think we have here in the lands watered by the Lakes a cotton
country of unlimited extent. We have
no frosts to cut off the crops and one
sowing of foreign seed serves for three
years - the natives have introduced it
themselves. The Lakes lie parallel with
some of the notorious slaving ports on the
East coast and traders must cross the
partition between them in coming from
the Interior. Lawful commerce & missions
would do an immense good here in the
course of time. I send a photograph on bad
paper which will shew you the similarity
between the Ancient Egyptian and modern
African pestles & mortars. Kind regards to
M^{rs} Murray M^r & M^{rs} Cook. David Livingstone