

Letter to Lord Palmerston, 13 May 1859

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)
[0001]

Senna 13th May 1859

Private

My Lord

We have just returned from the discovery of a magnificent inland Lake, and as you took a kind interest in our Expedition I feel anxious to tell you about our success so far. We ascended a branch of the Zambesi called the Shire about a hundred miles from its confluence in January last.

the people were very much alarmed never having been visited by whites before for the Portuguese have always been afraid of them as a very warlike race. the steamer caused a panic and we were constantly gaurded by large parties armed with bows and poisoned arrows. Returning lately we found the alarm subsided and left the vessel with [0002]

a chief named Chibisa. We then proceeded Northwards on foot and after 18 days march reached a large Lake called Shirwa. It is from twenty to thirty miles broad and 50 or sixty long – We could not see the end though we ascended a height for the purpose but two mountain tops rose in the blue distance like little islands, and the waves dashed on the rocks as if it were an arm of the sea. there is no outlet known. the water is slightly bitter and contains plenty of fish alligators & hippopotami the most interesting point about it is the fact as asserted by the natives

that there is a partition of only five or six miles between Lake Shirwa and Lake Nyinyesi = "stars" - the Nyanja, Nyassa &c of the maps which is very much larger - then as we found out afterwards Shirwa a part of Shirwa is only about 30 miles from the navigable Shire.

[0003]

Shirwa is surrounded by mountains of great height. many are 6000 feet high. the Lake is 2000 feet above the level of the sea - the whole region is high and well watered with flowing streams A very great quantity of land is under cultivation with cotton and everyone spins and weaves it even chiefs may be seen with the spindle and a bag instead of the distaff in hand. They treated us well. Only one party seemed inclined to treat us scurvily & they did so only untill they were told we were English - they had taken us for Portuguese and are in the habit of going down to Quilimane with slaves for sale. It is really no flattery to say that to you we owe the influence of the English name.

The French emigration slave trade

[0004]

goes on regularly now from Quilimane and the Portuguese say Ah we can sell our slaves now the English dare not interfere with French vessels It is indisputable that the repression of the slave trade was mainly owing to the cruisers. The other part of the plan - developing lawful commerce will I fear be checked by this new slave trade. A mercantile agency in the Shire would soon collect large quantities of cotton, but the Portuguese jealously watch us lest we introduce our own merchants. Were your Lordship in power - (We have had no news from England for fourteen months) I would strongly urge free trade to be secured on the Zambesi. We slept

22 days on the ground in this high
region and got wet with the dew off
the grass which overhangs the paths &
our heads every morning but returned
to the vessel in good health. We have
had cases of fever among us but it is
easily cured, and I think that colonization
by our own countrymen would complete
what your Lordship began in suppressing
the slave trade David Livingstone [D^r. Livingstone
13 may 1859]