

Letter to Charles Livingstone, 8 November 1854

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

Golungo Alto

8th Nov^r

1854

My Dear Charles

Its a weary time since I heard from any of my former correspondents. And I have but slender hopes of seeing any epistle from you while I am in Western Africa. the ship of the Commodore called the "Scourge" has gone up to Fernando Po for the mails. She is much beyond her time and we cannot guess the cause of her detention But when she comes my last hopes of hearing from friends will have to expire. I go away into the region where there are no mails, to cheer the weary wanderer.

I would have been fater away before this but bad health & good hope kept me about a month longer than was absolutely necessary at Loanda. Then when I came up into the coffee country as I had written some papers in a Newspaper recommending agriculture instead of slave trading. It was expected that I would shew some interest in the efforts of a few who are making laudable efforts to establish themselves as coffee growers. the trees are ready planted for them, and all that the best coffee in the world requires is to have the ground partially cleared and the fruit dried and sorted. they shewed extraordinary

[0002]

kindness and I had to refuse their gifts of coffee rice &c. I encouraged them to persevere and among other things I learned that the views of your Professor of Political Economy are nonsense. I shall return to this subject again In the mean time - I may relate that after spending some 8 or 10 days as above I came back to

this the residence of the chief of the District called Golungo Alto, And when on the point of starting he was seized with one of the deadly fevers of this land. I of course could not leave one who had shewed me a great deal of kindness when bending under disease I entered his dwelling in my way down to Loanda. I have been treating him for 8 days past. His head became affected and as he has none but slaves about him, I have to see everything done both by night and by day. Pity the poor mortal who falls sick among his slaves. this is a most kind and considerate master yet he says to me - "If you had not been here I think they would have knocked me on the head." they run riot among the eatables - As I do not venture to scold in Portuguese I can only be amused in silence at the affection developed by the domestic institution. they kill the goats & fowls - then tell me with faces of the most innocent wonderment - "the thing is dead" When [0003]

I tell them to throw them away there follows only a comfortable roasting. When the sweatmeats are devoured then one comes and tells me with a countenance of horror - "these slaves are robbing [master of] everthing" and this very one I have come accidentally upon in the act of eating Pine Apples rolled in a large plate of sugar. I can scarcely get the washerwoman to put my clothes in order though I pay her for it. Let who will go for slavery I vote for the freeman. I have seen a good deal of it now and from the unstudied words and actions of respectable masters I very much doubt if there is the least truth in the averment that many masters treat their slaves with kindness Living in the practice of habitual injustice to them, it is extremely questionable whether the better sort even can claim by a few dribblets of civility, the appellation of Kind Masters. It is fortunate that this country contains but few slaves in comparison with free men. In some districts of the Province the statistics drawn up by those who have no apparent motive for misstating the facts, [shew] the proportion of slaves in the entire population is 6.79 per cent.

But let us look at the subject of an armed force putting down the slave trade. the views entertained by your Professor - that such means [0004]

would only have the effect of increasing the horrors of the treatment of those who would be sent notwithstanding, to supply the demand. That no means would be effective for the suppression of this species of commerce so long as the profits were so large - And then if I recollect rightly in true Yankee style he jerked himself a little beyond the full length of his tether by the windy climax, that Great Britain would have consulted the interests of the slaves more had she instead of cruizers fitted out convenient well ventilated - well found Emigrant ships to convey the negroes to the Brazils, Bating the wind bag tacked on to the tail of them I considered his sentiments just. And would have been pleased had our squadron been withdrawn. But since I came into this country I found that the oft repeated tales of the increased horrors and increased numbers are nothing else than concoctions of the slave traders feeling the pressure from without Angola sent some thousands of slaves annually down the coast for exportation the trade was carried on thus. A trader went to the Interior to purchase wax, ivory &c. and slaves. And he always purchased as many as would carry his merchandise down to the [0005]

[2d] coast. He was sure of a market. Indeed in 1837 or just before the treaty for slave trade suppression with Portugal came into operation M^r Gabriel counted 39 ships in Loanda Harbour all waiting for cargoes of slaves. At present no ship dare appear on the coast with slave fettings except to make a dash into some one or two harbours load hastily by night & put to sea next morning but to return to the slaves of the time when when there were no British cruizers on the coast. All that came down were sold & exported. And as they cannot now export them neither can they buy them and therefore a new system of carrying merchandise [became] necessary. the new system is called, of "Carregadores" or carriers and the native chiefs living under the Portuguese are obliged to furnish these carriers to do the work formerly done only by slaves going to be exported. this district supplies 400 monthly, and other districts in proportion - I have met a thousand of them in one day either going or returning and every man of them was a proof of the effectiveness of the English cruizers in repressing

the slave trade - for, up to the time when the ships were placed on the coast all this work of carrying was performed by those who had no hope of return

Again, Before the English squadron began its operations the prices of good young slaves [0006] throughout the country near the coast or say within 200 miles of the coast line varied from 70 to 80 dollars per head (as they say) Now the very best may be had for from 10 to 20. If the reason is asked it invariably is "Because we can not now export them." But say some slave trade abettors if they can only get one cargo in four safe into the transatlantic ports they realize handsome profits I shall give you my reasons for doubting this. At present the thing seems to cut two ways. Slaves are very cheap now in Angola and that is clearly the effect of the intervention of an armed force. they are said to [be] dear in proportion in Cuba & Brazil. As soon as a trader gets his ten dollar per head cargo clear off the African coast Does he value them at that or at [the] 150 or 200 dollars he expects to get in Cuba. Clearly to my mind, his livestock has become very precious in the beast's own estimation, and unless some exception, of operative self interest, failing to influence him, can be proved as existing in his case. the most powerful motive he knows comes into play to make him lessen the horrors of the middle passage. though he regards them as beasts, it is well known all over the world that the most brutal being alive will be more likely to treat [well] a horse worth £200 than if it were worth £10. only. [0007]

My reasons for doubting the plea of handsome profits being realized by the few slave traders who manage to get clear off with an occasional cargo. are the following. I have made many enquiries and have not been able to discover more than two or three who have hold of riches got in the slave trade But again and again have individuals been pointed out to me as having been once very rich and having lost their all in it. But setting aside particular cases let us look at the capital of Angola - the city of Loanda. It may be said to be in ruins and if the cause of the decay be enquired into - It is the inability to carry on the slave trade as in what they term

the Palmy days of the city. they have an expressive way of indicating the pressure from without. We refrain say they "pela forza da necessidade" ("by the power of necessity") the public gardens on the walls of which stood the inscription written with all the successful slaveholder's pride "Let this serve as an example to Posterity" are now in ruins and so unrecognisable a gentleman of the Navy asked me when near it "Where are the gardens spoken of in the accounts of Loanda?" Many now turn their attention to Agriculture who if the tales of antisquadronites were true would much prefer the handsome profits of every fourth voyage. Indeed the tale seems to have [0008]

been got up by those who are friendly to the trade and others including your professor and your obd^t servant followed in the trail. thinking ourselves knowing fellows [too] and so far ahead of the ancients who thought that hard knocks would serve best the villains who trample remorselessly on God's image in ebony. the reason why some opinions get afloat is, occasionally in England people may give utterance to very strong views and their auditors are in profound ignorance that the spokesman is deriving a good income from an indirect connection with the slave trade I saw bales of goods for the traffic marked "Glasgow" If the American flag were not so often employed to cloak it there would be fewer profits still.

I have been examining some of the old Jesuit Mission stations in the country and the fruits of their labours. From all accounts the Jesuits were very exemplary in their lives and devoted themselves to the instruction of the people conscientiously. the effect of their efforts is seen in the numbers who can read & write in the country. They teach each other now and in the district of Ambaca it is considered a disgrace for any one to be unable to read When the Jesuits were expelled from Portuguese Territory by the Marquis of Pombal, the [0009]

the place of the Jesuits was supplied by a batch of the regular priesthood, with five long beards. these were graceless bardies, who loved to tuck up their nalcets around their waists and join in the dances of the natives I visited one of the stations called Bango a few days ago. It consists of a good church and row of buildings at right angles to the farther end. these contain the dormitories of the missionaries and

some large chests for holding their grub. there are no books, all, with the silver & gold having been removed by the present bishop to Loanda there are no inscriptions on their graves. they were just allowed to die out. & the poor fellows sleep in silence waiting for the sound of [the] terrible trumpet. the people could tell nothing about these last batch except their fine beards. But one ventured on being questioned to tell that an inhabitant of the lovely valley of Bango was honoured by the arrival in his domicile of a little white stranger Being afraid to speak out on the occasion He remarked. "A wonderful thing has happened in Bango. Both my wife and I am black yet we have got a white child! this must be another of the miracles of St. Hilarion" - (the patron saint of the establishment) the man told it with a twitching of the muscles about the mouth which shewed he had often enjoyed a hearty guffaw on the subject before

You will percieve that the country possesses
[0010]
features of great interest. the people are ready for reading the word of God. What a difference between them and those with whom I have to deal in the regions beyond. Long years of our short lives must be spent in the monotonous labour of teaching to read those who have an inveterate propensity to believe that they are conferring a great favour by condescending to learn. And after they have acquired a knowledge of reading the majority of the young turn their backs as obstinately against the gospel as before. they think we have some interested motive in drawing them to Christ. they will lose some of their self-esteem if they yield. &c &c So that more rigorous measures by God's providence seem absolutely necessary to humble or punish them. Yet when As in the case of Tahiti the rod falls upon them what a hulleboloo we make about it in England. Here the people have been suffering the rod of the oppressor for centuries, and as they can read they are in a proper state for recieving divine knowledge I have a strong desire to scatter some bibles among them. And perhaps do more. But will the Portuguese allow me? I came out behind them. they would not have allowed me to go in from Loanda. No English man ever saw their fine fruitful country before Being known now somewhat in the world they

[0011]

could not for shame refuse me passage back. But
it is ten to one if they would allow me to land
a box of bibles at Loanda. To do them justice
however I must say they have all treated me
with extraordinary kindness -

 this although they looked upon my coming as another wedge
 in against their slave trading - When they saw me in the interior calculating
 longitudes they wondered why a "Doctor Mathematico" should pretend to be a
 missionary

the above are my
suspicions more than actual knowledge of what
they would have done. the bishop did everything
he could for me. giving presents to all my com-
pany - a horse saddle & bridle ~~for the chief~~ and
the dress of a Colonel with Epaulettes cocked hat &c
for the chief. Sending an order to all the
commandants to furnish me with every th[...]
I needed till beyond Portuguese territory
He embraced me when parting, bless His
Reverendissimus, I would have preferred
a kiss from my wife to a hug from this
benevolent & kind hearted celibate in crimson
silk gown & golden cross hung to his neck
It will be better not to publish anything
about the state of the Angolese perhaps for
Rome is vigilant and would not hesitate
to act immediately if it were only to shut
the door. I earnestly pray I may be permitted
to do something for the spread of Knowledge
of Christ here. Physically it is one of the finest
countries in the world but one would not
think so at the coast. In here the luxuriance
of vegetation is wonderful and beautiful. The

[0012]

missionaries introduced many fine fruit trees from
South America. One called fruta da Conde is like cream
in taste. A wild one called Masubiri has a large
fruit and resembles in appearance the breadfruit
I wish I could send you seeds. Edens fruits
have all been allowed to degenerate except the
vine. In the Millennium I suppose they will be
recultivated and as much improved as the apple is
above the crab. My love to your spouse, and
Sma'family. I shall leave this as soon as my
patient is better. I have found an invaluable
friend [in Loanda - West Coast (of Africa)] in Her Majestys Commissioner Edmund
Gabriel Esq^{re} Any letter sent to him will be for-
warded to England by him if I am there. D. Livingston

I have written John by same mail
a yankee vessel will take both to the States
(Boston?)

Rev^d Charles Livingston

Plympton

Near Boston, Massachusetts

United States