

Letter to [George Denman?], [26 September 1861?]

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

We who were up on the Highlands found all the people fleeing from the Ajawa and it was clear that if they were not induced to desist the bishop would soon have the country to himself. We therefore went to the vicinity of Mount Zomba to hold a parley with the marauders. We came upon them when in the act of burning three villages. Here the bishop offered up a fervent prayer. The Ajawa had a long line of captives laden with plunder and we could hear the wail for the dead mingling with the shouts of welcome to the victors. The Ajawa asked if we came peaceably & though we assured them that we did they seemed to look upon us - A party of about 20 - as such an easy prey that they began notwithstanding, to shoot us with their poisoned arrows - this probably arose from some Manganja who followed us calling out to them "Chibisa is come." Chibisa is one of their great

[0002]

generals and is believed to ensure victory by his medicines. this deprived us of the benefit of our English name - such has been the effect of the English cruizers and Lord Palmerston's entire slave trade policy that wherever known the English name is highly respected. An Arab Dhow, for instance, which was purchasing slaves & ivory about twenty miles south of this and we are now 120 miles up the Lake, fled as soon as they heard that three English men were coming up. Elated as the Ajawa were with their victories, they only interpreted our assurances and [our] slowly retiring from their village as evidences of fear, rushed at and surrounded us. Poisoned arrows

shot at 50 yards distance are no joke, so we were obliged to drive them away with our arms. When they saw how far our rifles carried they never came near again but left that part of the country.

[0003]

The bishop will now follow his work in peace, that is, if the Portuguese will allow him. It is believed that the gaurdianship of the coast from Cape Delgado to Delagoa Bay was given to them for the especial purpose of suppressing the slave trade - they have virtually converted it into a private slave preserve for the the benefit of the favourites of the Govt. of Lisbon. I am very unwilling to believe this of them, but I must at last confess it to be the case. Major Secard was removed from Tette because he favoured us, and much against his will made Governor of Iboe "interiors" i.e. in the mean time, till another comes out. It thus came to him in a way he could not refuse but complained loudly at Mosambique that it placed him in a false position for there is no trade at Iboe to speak of but [in] slaves

[0004]

He was thus almost compelled to become a slave trader. The Governor G.¹ of Mozambique has gone into recieving all the emoluments of slave trading. the Governor of Quillimane has given his daughter to a Senhor Cruz the principal [slave] trader of this quarter, and he of Tette had slaves up at Zomba purchasing the Ajawa captives. The salaries of all these Governors are small - the court of Lisbon knows them to be so yet the appointments are well known to be conferred as favours. In fact the profits arising from conniving at the slave trade are the emoluments which the Portuguese Government confers on its officers. The province costs the mother country about £5000

annually, and no trade is carried on between East Africa and Portugal. Why they should persist in keeping all other nations out I cannot divine for the few traders they have are either half castes - convicts or the officers of convict soldiers. I am unwilling to believe that Don Pedro knows anything about it. He wished to colonize and some soldiers were last year sent out as colonists. the Governor of Tette told me that the whole thing was a gross imposition on his Majesty for though

[0005]

agricultural implements had also been sent the soldiers knew nothing except cleaning their accoutrements. For his majesty's own sake the way should be opened for other nations for then alone will it be known that he is not to blame. The presence of others would undoubtedly be most beneficial to the Portuguese settlements in the way of stimulating their industry. If we exclude ivory and slaves there is more ~~trade~~ [produce] carried out in one year - from Natal than has been during the last hundred from the Zambesi. Whatever you can do in the way of inducing the Portuguese to abandon their exclusive policy will be so much gain to the cause of humanity and progress.

We carried a boat past thirty five miles of cataracts and then sailed her up. In no part of Africa have we seen such a teeming population as on the shores of this Lake. It may be because this is the fishing season

[0006]

but the shores seem covered with people. Slaves ivory and cotton are offered for sale. We can only promise that a large ship will soon come and buy all the latter two articles. If we may judge from the amount of cotton we buy at the ship from a small portion of the river Shire, and that too not in the cotton season, the supply to be obtained

here will be very considerable. the
Lake is deep - we got no bottom with
our sounding line at 35 fathoms say
200 feet. It has no current in it.
there are four crossing places on it.
and the canoes which go at a good
rate cross over at one place in six
hours - in another in twelve, and
in some parts they do not cross at
all - though even there we can see
the tops of the mountains. We shall
measure it but it may be said to
be from 30 to 50 miles broad. It has
a long coast line from numerous

[0007]

bays, and is surrounded, as far as
we have yet been, by mountains. the
people we called Marimba. they
are civil. The lake rises during the
rainy season about 3 feet - the waves
and rollers, which are very formidable,
go up to four feet. In Average years
the Shire rises about the same height,
and never falls much - but this
last was an extraordinary year &
it left marks 12 feet above ordinary
levels. At the upper part of the Elephant
marsh the Shire branches out so that
we could not get five feet for the
Pioneer below that it is all deep &
above the cataracts it is all deep -
again into the Lake, when it shelves off
8, 10, 12 14 &c fathoms - if we get
calmer weather we shall measure
the depth better (no bottom at 100 fathoms)

thanks for your friend Blakesley's
criticisms. I think that he has missed
my weak point. It is not the Zambesi

[0008]

for a Mississippi steamer could
ply on it the whole of ordinary years,
and eight months of the drier ones.
Any amount of coal too could be
obtained and [a] Lignum vitae & ebony
trade be at once established. My weak
point lies in the presence of the Portuguese
penal settlements; and the Portuguese Governors
ready to sell their grandmothers for gain.
If however in the quiet of his incumbering

he will concoct a better plan than either
D^r Barth's or mine, and then come
out to help to put it into execution
I promise him as good elephant &
hippopotami shooting as is to be found
in Africa. the people have few or no
guns and the animals are not afraid of
the bow and arrow - If he will not
accede to these terms I need not try him
with a fish which seems to possess
some of the shape and habits of our salmon
but be contented with and thankful
for any more criticisms you may supply.

I am anxiously expecting a steamer
for this Lake - she must be a strong
one. Ma Robert would have floundered
here in the first storm. I think it may be
best to go on establishing ourselves
without heeding the Portuguese at
home - if they plunder my goods at
Tette I shall say little - please remember
me to your brother Captain Denman
& believe me yours &c David Livingstone