

## Letter to John Washington, 13 September 1858

*Livingstone, David, 1813-1873*

Published by Livingstone Online ([livingstoneonline.org](http://livingstoneonline.org))

[0001]

[On the [...]]

A grant has been made by the  
Cape Parliament for the path through Kuruman  
you suggested. M<sup>r</sup> Moffat has undertaken it.]

Tette 13<sup>th</sup> Sept<sup>r</sup> 1858

Private

My Dear Captain Washington

I thank you a thousand  
times for the wise precaution you took of  
placing Captain Duncan on a proper understanding  
with Bedingfeld before we left Liverpool  
But for that we could not have lived with  
Bedingfeld in whom I am sorry to say I have  
been completely mistaken. I confess  
that you saw much farther than I did when you  
disapproved of my haste in naming him  
for whenever he was free from sea-  
sickness he quarrelled with some one. First  
the engineer and but for Captain Duncan's  
kind interposition we should have been  
deprived of the best man that Tod & Macgregor  
of Glasgow could give us. He offered to go  
as a stoker in the Pearl rather than be abused  
by Bedingfeld's tongue. That over B. shirked  
the Bar of the Luabo unless I ordered him  
again he having written orders to the effect  
in his possession - He quarrelled with  
Duncan and every time the Pearl got into  
difficulty there Bedingfeld came on board  
& had a public altercation with Duncan  
before the crew of the latter - At Row

[0002]

Nº 4. I put a stop to it by saying - " Captain  
Bedingfeld I must have no more of these  
public altercations." He retired to write his  
resignation and delivered it to me that evening  
I would have sent him home by the Hermes

but Captain Gordon being still with us told me it was done in a temporary fit of anger and he would be happy to be the medium of withdrawing it. I allowed him to withdraw it but he at once asserted that he had done quite right in writing it - that he had been slighted - not consulted as man of his high position ought to have been &. &c. He had a fifth altercation with Duncan and though he had my written orders to pilot the Pearl out of the river and I had promised to see that done he told Duncan with some bitter taunts that "the Launch should not go down if he could help it notwithstanding my promise. To effect this he reported to me that the rivet heads were rusting off (after five weeks service only) and that she could not go down to the mouth of the Kongone without making it probable that she would never get up here. He wrote a protest to that effect, and when I examined the rivet heads and asked him to shew which were rusting off - He got on his high horse saying that he had always been associated with gentlemen Did I doubt his word - you are not a gentleman. (referring to my early life)

[0003]

He wanted to convert the Launch into a separate command asserting to me her total incapacity to carry anything. "I can tow but I cant carry anything." (I brought up four tons in her this trip) and turned out the luggage to other members from what he called "my cabin" the only accommodation the party had. He then gave in another resignation and boasted to D<sup>r</sup> Kirk and others that he had done so - then twice expressed sorrow to myself that I had not accepted it. He evidently thought himself indispensable and the airs he put on no tongue can tell. Would you believe that the fact of his having a higher salary than I have was constantly quoted as evidence of his high position and attainments while he absolutely could do nothing except take a latitude constantly boasting of being a man of business and that you had said to him that I was not a man of business he shewed his talent by ordering everything he could think of. Imagine my consternation on seeing ninety casks of Kroomen's possessions turned out of the Pearl. Well not being easily abashed I proposed

carrying a little in the Launch as the Portuguese were engaged in a war & could not help us. No, no, he could tow only. It required nine trips to carry our 25 tons of luggage thus but by loading the Launch with two tons we could removed all in five - he seemed then to think it necessary to prove that his work was excessively difficult - ran the launch aground every dozen miles - kept her excessively dirty - pointedly refused

[0004]

in presence of M<sup>r</sup> Thornton to have anything to do with making a systematic arrangement for the expenditure of the Kroomen's provisions and at last when M<sup>r</sup> Baines ran her aground as he was taking his dinner Bedingfeld said to M<sup>r</sup> Rae - "I saw that, and let them, do you think they could do without me." As he was thwarting the progress of the Expedition while ostentatiously promoting it, and I had borne with his insubordination - carping, complaining and raising objections at every step - besides taunting me with not having accepted his resignation I made arrangements with Colonel Nunes to have him safely conveyed to Kilimane - lodged there comfortably in my former quarters till a man of war should call and then gave him my acceptance of his resignation which he recieved by dancing and singing and calling the Kroomen together said - "Ah I shall soon be out at Sierra Leone in charge of a man of war and will know to whom to give jobs" He had often boasted that if that should happen which had now come to pass all the Kroomen would go with him. They now came and told me that when Governor Hill told the head man to select 11 men of war's Kroomen he readily found them but on finding at our arrival that Bedingfeld was to command all that party deserted except three and now that he was dismissed they would do anything for me. As he

[0005]

had previously tried to raise a clamour by standing up for the Kroomen to get their Sundays and stop the steamer for their proper time for meals, while I was straining every nerve and never resting

on that day unless we were all together  
the country being in a state of war and  
the healthy season passing quickly away  
I felt very glad to find that this dodge  
of his had failed too. and mounting the  
paddle box myself made a quicker passage  
up to Shupanga than he ever did and  
never once touched the ground. I then tried  
D<sup>r</sup> Kirk and he being equally successful  
you may expect Bedingfeld home  
to nurse his dignity where it will do  
no harm. I came up here in seventeen  
days from Shupanga though the water  
is nearly at its lowest and we spent  
five days in one part where the river  
is nearly four miles broad seeking a  
passage and one half of our time was  
spent in cutting wood. Above Lupata  
all is fine though many sand banks are  
there but the river is in one channel &  
we ran up with both steam & sails -  
Here we are visited with as much  
interest as you do the Leviathan and  
I have got about two tons of coal in

[0006]

her the first ever dug in Zambesia.  
I go down to bring up all my companions  
tomorrow. Kebra basa is maintained to be  
not a waterfall but a number of rocks  
jutting out of the stream. There is a narrow  
deep channel which at some parts is  
rendered tortuous. If I can blast away  
some of those that stand in the wrong  
places I shall not grudge a few hundred  
pounds of powder and a few months  
toil though I dont promise to turn  
quarryman. My men, poor fellows  
clustered around me and caught hold of  
me in a sort of convulsive way while  
some screamed with joy. I never shed  
a tear but they now ran down my  
cheeks involuntarily. Thirty of them died  
of small pox, and six were lately killed  
by a rebel in his stockade at the mouth  
of the Luenya - for these all our hearts  
are very sore. They have a great stock  
of pigs and tell me that they were often  
taunted by the Tett people saying that I  
would never return. Many have taken  
unto themselves wives and all have lots

of beads which they have gained by wood cutting and intend to take home. I have entered poor Sekwebu's confidential servant as a Krooman and I gave all the rest two fathoms of cloth each. I shall give other

[0007]

other things when the luggage is up according to your instructions.

Your remember the Ban was rejected by Bedingfeld. I feel positive that she is exactly what we need here - the Launch whose engine ought to be called the Asthmatic draws 2 ft 6 or 7 when loaded and instead of "very little wood being required" we give her 1 1/2 cwt of dry lignum vitae each hour. B's report from Liverpool was erroneous and I found it out only after our coals were done. With wood alone we never get five knots out of her. The canoes slowly punting along pass us and look back at us to our infinite disgust. The engine is badly constructed the boiler tubes being placed below the fire & on one side - so one side of the boiler is cool while the other is hot and five hours are necessary to get up steam. There is no steam chest and though I protested than ten horse was too little no more was given because forsooth an old cylinder cast for a low pressure was for the sake of saving expense employed

[0008]

The feed pipe is longer than the other instead of being smaller and while I say that the vessel herself is not a bad one Laird has treated us shamefully with the engine. I was passive about the Ban as indeed I was about many other things when I had a naval officer to attend to these things I now remember that B. was very anxious that I should apply for a second master and when I refused he condemned the Ban on the report of some unknown carpenter. It is impossible not to suspect something was wrong when we found Bedingfeld suffered

so much from seasickness which he  
says grows upon him that he could  
not have navigated her out. He has  
frequently boasted of having been twice  
tried by court-martial & once [& punished]~~dismissed the navy~~. A clever thing he did was to  
write a "log" after his resignation was  
accepted from the private journal of  
M<sup>r</sup> Baines, and apply to me for a sextant  
chronometer &c. by way of making  
himself appear only suspended, so as to  
claim his pay but I told him it  
was stopped on the 31<sup>st</sup> July - this was  
the only thing that brought him to his  
senses.

I am &c. David Livingstone