

Letter to Lord Palmerston

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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[0001]

Rovuma Bay 16 Oct^r

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Private

My Lord

In spite of all our efforts we were baffled and delayed in the lower part of the Zambesi till the river fell and we had to go to Johanna for a new crew. It then occurred to me to go up the river Rovuma in boats and see whether in the event of the Portuguese continuing to refuse free egress by the Zambesi we have not another outlet from the Lake region. We began our ascent on the 9th September and went up 114 miles as the crow flies but 156 of actual distance up the river. The water as we expected was very low and we had often to drag the boats over shoals but in one month we had accomplished all that it was prudent to attempt.

We had to pass a number of river pirates about sixty miles

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from the mouth and tried hard to keep on friendly terms with them but after paying about 30 yards of calico by way of cementing friendship they parted with us by giving us a volley of arrows and four musket balls went through my sail. I believe they expected us to run away and leave all we had to be plundered. They were living

on sandbanks afraid they said of
being stolen, and intent on stealing
others. hey partake of the border
character, and are found all round
Africa ever hindering ingress, and
I think slave-hunting makes them
bloodthirsty. he attack on us was
perfectly causeless, and in one village
we saw two human heads cut off.
hrough them there was no trade
but above that part a great deal
is carried on by means of canoes,
and all the people even those
of the same tribe were quite friendly.

he river has an elevated table
land on each side for eighty miles,
it then opens on a wide plain with
here and there detached hills.

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On this plain the slave trade route from
Nyassa to Quiloa (Kilwa) passes. It
touches the river twice & indeed it
crosses the Rovuma about thirty miles
beyond our turning point - and that
ford is only ten days from the Lake.
The bed of the Rovuma gradually became
rocky, and at last was seen coming
by numerous channels through
masses of rock, though the adjacent
country was as far as we could see
still quite level. he canoes go
through these channels and we might
have hauled the boats but they
would have been damaged in the
[^][descent] and having come to the limits of
steam navigation we did not wish
to lose a moment of the flood time
in the Zambesi

The people generally cultivate largely
but all live in fear of being stolen .
They keep large quantities of grain and
oil yielding seeds in the woods but live
on sandbanks now that the river is
low - and are much more afraid of
losing themselves than their goods. ne cannot the amount
which will be added to the sum of
human happiness by the success
of the English measures for abolishing

the slave trade. his part possesses

[0004]

great natural riches in oil producing seeds
gum copal, and valuable timber. he
ebony far exceeds in size & value that of
commerce, and besides some valuable
woods for ship building we saw many
quite new to us. We saw but little
cotton but it was growing around old
villages. Indeed we saw but little of
the country. We have now seen the river
in flood and at its lowest. It has the
disadvantage of the Tsetse - but a steamer
drawing 18 inches of water when loaded
could ply during seven or eight months
of the year, and raise a lucrative trade,
there is no bar at the mouth, and
should English trade prosper on the
Lake this route will be adopted rather
than pay dues to the Portuguese who
never using the mouths of the Zambesi
themselves have established a sort
of "paper blockade" over them. We sail
tomorrow back to the Zambesi. No one
has felt the delay more keenly than I have
done - and no effort on my part
will be spared that in my next I
may be able to report that we
have commenced work on the Lake.

Allow me to congratulate you on
the present very favourable aspect of the
slave trade question. It seems as if you were
to see your long continued labours crowned
with success. With kind salutation to Lady P.

I am &c David Livingstone