

Letter to John Washington, 6, 20 December 1861

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

H.M.S. Pioneer 6 Dec^r 1861

Private

Dear Captain Washington

I have to thank you for several letters [up to 5th May] which as usual came in a heap. the mail was brought up by three of the Ox & Cam. missionaries who came up the Shire in common country canoes without knowing a word of the language or a bit of the way - a feat I believe never yet performed by a Portuguese. Thanks for all your kindness in writing and in doing on our behalf.

the Pioneer is I am sorry to find much too deep for river work. We observed that in the Rovuma - and again when we reached the upper part of the Elephant Marsh. Below that she has plenty of water. We warped her up some 20 or 30 miles in order to place the missionaries and our men in a healthy spot at Chibisa's, and will do the same to place our new steamer on the Lake. Were it possible to put Pioneer on the Lake she would suit us admirably. She is so strong and nothing but a strong and deep boat will do there. After seeing the missionaries up to the Highlands we carried a boat past Murchison's Cataracts a distance in Lat of 35° but about 40° with the Longitude. When there we are virtually on the Lake for the Upper Shire is all deep and smooth. The Lake is very deep. As the Shire is from 9 to 15 feet so the Lake gradually deepens to as many fathoms. Then in rounding a mountainous promontory which gives a forked appearance to the southern end

[0002]

and which we wish to name Cape Maclear - we felt no bottom with our leadline of 35 fathoms at a mile from the shore. In the north in 11° 40° S. Lat. we tried with a fishing line in a bay and found bottom at 100 fathoms - a mile outside no bottom at 116 fathoms but the line broke in coming up

a ship would not get anchorage except near the Shore, but there are several small rounded rocky islands and adjacent to these as also to all the rocky headlines there are rocks jutting out or only covered with a few feet of water. The Lake is from 20 to 50 or 60 miles broad but we could not measure it by a chronometer as we were there during the Equinoctial gales and tremendous seas get up in 15 or 20 minutes The rollers are as large as I ever saw at the mouth of the Zambesi. they come across the Lake with perpendicular sides and hairy heads and break in 14 or 15 fathoms. We had to beach the boat every night to prevent her being swamped at anchor and often durst not attempt to launch her. An Arab dhow lately built to carry slaves across fled from us twice to the Eastern shore. It would have been madness to have wished ourselves in a slight open boat. Though the great object of our exploration was not attained, I mean the question of the Rovuma, I cannot blame myself. We did all than it was possible to do - and came back as lean and dried up as red herrings We could see that the Lake is surrounded by mountains and high table lands. It was only by sketches and bearings [at different Latitudes] of these as the sun rose behind them that we got an approximation to the width. When we passed $11^{\circ} 40' S$. we came to a recently depopulated region. Human skeletons and putrid bodies lay everywhere - no food

[0003]

was to be had and some of the people - a tribe of Zulus from the south originally, fled from us. The boat went about 20° beyond the last latitude I took. I went nearly as far as the mountains. thence and also from the boat 20° more could be seen. So we may say that the Lake extends to the southern borders of the tenth degree of south Latitude. It begins in $14^{\circ} 25'$ and may be 225 miles long. We say over 200 miles. Pirates live on detached rocks on that part of the coast, and food was so scarce that a fathom of cloth was demanded for a fish's head. We came away back along the West shore the reports about Rovuma as contradictory as possible. One man asserted positively that we could sail out of the Lake into the river, a second that we must lift the boat a few yards a third - fifty miles. A fourth a hundred. All agreed in saying that it is a very large river. The islands are uninhabited, with perhaps one

exception - no current could be detected. It rises and falls about 3 feet between the dry & wet seasons. The population is prodigiously large. I never saw so many people as those who live on its shores. Slaving is the only trade. I was much disappointed in not finding a large river on the West that would have lessened the Longitude to the Makololo Country. Five rivers flow in on that side but they are small. The Lake is not much longer than we have seen for the people do not cross but go round it where we turned.

It will take us a whole year to carry our vessel past the rapids. We were stationary at Chibisa's yet collected with ease cotton equal to 300 lbs of clean cotton - the price very low and our calico so flimsy that we felt we

[0004]

guilty of cheating them. It is high time that regular cotton agents should begin their work. Had we been able to run up and down a great deal more could have been bought. The goods M^r Clegg sent are quite unsuitable for the people here. M^r Aspinall Turner supplied us before. £45 worth bought by M^r May at the Cape possessed the same character for flimsiness and while in going North we could buy any amount of food, in coming South we have been found out, and we could not get enough to satisfy hunger - they fling the cloth at us, and called it mosquito curtains. An investment [by May] in a sort of penny trumpet is quite unsaleable - so are trumpety looking glasses. Had M^r May refrained from spending money at the Cape, we could have supplied ourselves with strong American calico on the Zambesi at a cheaper rate ~~than~~ and saved ourselves the annoyance of seeing slave buyers with better cloth than we could offer. The unavoidable injury to our character for fair dealing is lamentable, the velvet is a good deal weaker than common brown paper. I shall be obliged to purchase other stuff for wages at the roadmaking.

M^r Rae writes that he has put down a watch for me among his losses. We sent 2 pocket chronometers by him for cleaning & repair. I believe I gave you the numbers. I had no watch there, but a silver thermometer case as my own pocket chronometer is now defunct I shall if you please buy this watch that is coming, and which he says he put down by mistake for the silver case. He was

ordered to go by way of the Cape in charge of botanical collections and the chronometers When the Lyra took him away from Quilimane they met a ship going to the Cape he put [ten of] the boxes aboard but would not go himself. Went towards Aden and came to grief. We hear that five of the boxes were lately seen at Mozambique- to D^r Kirk's great sorrow unaddressed.

[0005]

In connection with the thermometer, I learned what, though probably well known to you was perfectly new to me - the glass tube and ivory scale expand and contract so as to ensure fracture It was a neat pocket instrument in a silver case by Dixey of New Bond St. and had a small compass on the lid. It was broken opposite to the bulge inwards of this compass and I concluded that pressure against my side had done it - sent for another, it came out in a wooden case and broken too the ivory scale had

contracted by the heat and the glass expanded and fracture was the result. I suppose glass scale blue with white figures would be the proper thing. I valued the instrument lost on account of its being a present from Sir Culling E. Earldley, but the watch is of much more value, and needing it if you let me know the price I shall add it to the money I have on hand for current expenses or give you an order on my banker for the amount.

A very fine sextant was bought out by M^r May. It is easily adjusted to index Error 0 but above 100" degrees two images of the sun are formed one from the surface of the glass mirror and another from the quicksilver behind. This would have been no great disadvantage as we should have used it only at lower altitudes, but the mercury being in the same box leaked and an amalgam was formed on the arc which renders it illegible in the evenings. M^r Maclear will send you a tracing of the Lake with my work there. The West side is a remarkable succession of bays one after the other up to the North. No Latitude was taken after I left the boat. Fever was among them.

[0006]

I earnestly hope that the gins sent are not saw

gins, M^r Clegg says they deteriorate the cotton. We send our bit of cotton to M^r Turner M.P. for Manchester. We wish to secure a good character for our cotton but the gin we had would not clean it though improvements were tried by M^r Hardisty I hope too the press is an hydraulic one. The others are so enormously heavy. If you saw them yourself I am sure it will be hydraulic

The opinions of such men as Sir James Black, Sir James Liddell and D^r Bryson are not to be despised, though not a medical man you will easily understand that two of the ingredients of the pills are incompatible, that is, they are believed to decompose each other when brought into combination. Calomel & quinine should never be combined in a scientific prescription But Opium and sugar of lead are just as incompatible and yet they are the ingredients of one of the best pills we have for dysentery and stand in the Pharmacopoea. It is believed that they do dissolve each other & form a compound which is eminently useful. You must understand however that I do not for a moment justify unscientific prescriptions.

We were all taught to reduce the fever before giving quinine. D^r MacWilliam followed this rule rigorously in 1841. But in 1850 I took my children with me to Lake Ngami intending to settle with Sebituane. Fever knocked down two of them and I was led by feelings which you can well understand to give quinine before the fever was reduced, and with such good effect I have followed the plan ever since. Quinine is the great curative agent for fever, the pills are but half the cure. We give the quinine until cinchonism is produced, and with the pure quinine that is effected by a few doses after the pills.

[0007]

I took seven Johanna men on trial and dismissed six Europeans into the Wasp. We find that the Johanna men are better than Kroomen they never take fever and work well. They have the same wages viz. a fraction under one shilling per day. We shall try and get a dozen more and do with as few Europeans as possible. An engineer, two stokers - a carpenter - a cook and two quartermasters seem indispensable. At present we have two seamen besides. I trust you have renewed the request to the new Admiral to render us assistance, we need a

good many things from the dockyard. Slops taken up by officers are paid to me and I put the money to the balance on hand for current expenses. Those taken up by the men are placed against them when leaving. I have £50 on hand now and this will do I believe for all incidental expenses for next year. I have to pay the wages of M^r May's interpreter yet and purchase calicoes for wages to the people to be employed in road making. I suppose Sir George Grey will have sent home a bill for two mules and two scotch carts I asked him to send us to carry the steamer across.

We had bought a number of hoes for the road at about 6^d each. They are of native manufacture entirely. Many of the tools you have sent will be very useful and I think quite sufficient for our purpose as we go out from the river and thereby avoid many gullies and hills. It will be a curve of some 50 miles long - 1200 feet of altitude must be got up. The West is far easier than the East bank, where so many spurs come down from the highlands. We shall have plenty of workmen if we have calico - a cubit

[0008]

a day is handsome pay to them. When we came the first time we could not get a guide without the greatest trouble - now we can get fifty in five hours notice. As soon as we get on the Lake not an hour will be lost before settling the Rovuma question. The Portuguese have built a fort near the mouth of the Shire to enrich themselves with the dues from the cotton trade while others work hard to render the Shire as devoid of population as the Zambesi. So I am quite alive to the expediency of securing another outlet

Between ourselves I am rather mortified to find that missionaries went to fight the Ajawa. I would not have gone [at first] had I in the least suspected an attack, but used messages and presents before venturing among them. The head chief Chisunze of [of Manganja] came afterwards and urged our going to drive the Ajawa entirely away. I was spokesman and gave him to understand in unmistakeable terms that we did not come to fight nor would we use our arms except in self defence as in the

case which had just occurred. The bishop agreed to all I uttered, and enumerated the points inculcated as religion - peace unity - no slave selling - industry and civilization. I did not know that I had touched on all these points, but after we left he went, assaulted the Ajawa burned their town and took a number of captives - they are now our enemies for life. We could have easily got over the first affair for all acknowledge that the party that begins the fight has all the guilt, but I fear we shall never be friends now

[0009]

3^d Sheet

Many thanks for the ale - none however has yet come to hand, but it will turn up in time - we had some when we returned from Nyassa and it is after severe exposure and sun roasting, that one enjoys it thoroughly. One of the younger Hanbury's sent us 4 dozen=corks unwired and 4 bottles only remained of the whole.

D^{rs} Kirk and Meller will draw their salaries by means of their brothers - I give a certificate of ~~heal~~ life and we make a sort of power of attorney not properly worded of course, but by your assistance it may do Mess^s Gedye & Hardisty's Father's draw their salaries and M^r Frederick Fitch does the same for my brother. I have drawn slops from the Siden and Wasp - some have been taken up by the seamen. I keep a list and give it off to the Forté or Admiral's ship if they leave to be deducted from their pay. Some have been taken up by the officers of the Expedition. To simplify the accounts I take their money value and place it with the balance on hand - and with some I paid sixteen Makololo who were intended to form a land party on the Rovuma and did act in that capacity on Nyassa - we thought of leaving them at the foot of the Lake & to let the boat party perform all the Exploration

[0010]

but though they were quite willing to remain
in the event of accident to the boat we should have
perished. It was only fear of our numbers that
induced civility where slaving goes on. In the sphere
of the dhow's operations the people were worse
than I ever saw Africans. We were robbed twice
(the first time to me in Africa) - and one of the
natives was robbed and bound for sale when the
chief interfered and liberated him. We should
have captured the dhow had we got a chance
but the owners three Arabs or light coloured
people fled to the East shore as we came near
As we came South there were only black men
in her and they fled again as we approached
I suppose no fault will be found with us
for taking her though we have no slave papers

20 Dec^r

I see that I have repeated myself
consequence of having written at
different times. We started from the
island Dakanamaio [15 Nov^r] by a sudden
rise of the river dropped down about
ten miles - and next day could go
no further as it fell a foot. We
have been detained ever since waiting
for the river to rise - I mean to
go down to the Kongone in an old
whaler so as to communicate
with any Man of War that may
call and land the provisions.
The river will be sure to rise
in January - and then the ship
will come down - as I take
the mail with me I close this now

Ever yours &c David Livingstone

[0011]

We got a couple of whalers with the Ma Robert, built by a man in Liverpool they were of first
rate quality and only now are worn out - stem & stern of same
shape. The Nyassa boat was made purposely very thin - she is hoisted up to a
tree above the cataracts - and we have only one boat now - could you
send us out two whalers - ? made strong with
lockers behind

P. S. We once in coming up the
theShire in the Ma Robert killed a number
of elephants but got the tusks of three
only - four tusks were worth selling
and I sent them to Mozambique
and got £50 for them. We used
Government wine & brandy for

quinine as long as it lasted - then
brought more for the same purpose
and in addition some private mess
stores - which we did not use except
on Sundays and special occasions
Baines confessed to making away
with half the wine - offered to pay
for it but when we were making
up the account denied taking
it. I once came in upon him
regaling three of his convict friends
the Portuguese with our wine.
We shared the loss. As well
as other losses by the same
man. Will it be wrong in
me to repay D^r Kirk, M^r Livingstone
M^r Rae, M^r Thornton & self
our losses out of this £50.
I think it will suffice to pay
all our private mess bills
together for we were very moderate -
if you say yes there is no
objection to it I shall do it.

[0012]

M^r Gedye begs me to tell you
that M^r May received payment
for keeping stores he will esteem
it a favour if you grant him
the same. I can say that he is
well worthy of it - attends carefully
to his duty, and during our absence
had entire charge of the ship. He
will occupy the same position
when we are at work on the
boat and carrying the steamer
Indeed he took charge of the stores
on the way out & not M^r May.

A naval officer named Burlton
applied for employment. I declined
his services. A mixed naval & civil
expedition cannot possibly work. This was
unmistakably evident in May's case. He
was assured of absolute command of the
Pioneer even if Kirk succeeded [me] until the
pleasure of the Foreign office were known.
"No, No, he would not play second fiddle &c.
And this the man of whom you said to me
before leaving England. "If any of your
officers set up their backs as May has done
in the Niger, you will be perfectly justified

in leaving him on the first island." A master of one of the river steamers might do but with all due respect to the service I think that no naval officer will do unless it is converted into a naval expedition entirely.

We use quinine wine out of deference to the opinions of greater men - we have plenty now and will send for it to the Cape as we need it.

D. Livingstone