

Letter to Roderick I. Murchison, 2 February 1867

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)
[0001]

Bemba 2nd February

1867

Private

My Dear Sir Roderick

This is the first opportunity I have had of sending a letter to the Coast and it is by a party of black Arab slave traders from Bagamoio near Zanzibar. They had penetrated here for the first time and came by a shorter way than we did. In my Despatch to Lord Clarendon I give but a meagre geographical report because the traders would not stay more than half a day but having written that through the night I persuaded them to give me an hour or two this morning - and if yours is fuller than his Lordship's you will know how to manage. I mentioned to him that I could not go round the North end of Lake Nyassa because the Johanna men would have fled at first sight of danger - and they did actually flee on the mere report of the acts of the terrible Mazitu at its Southern extremity. Had I got them fairly beyond the Lake they would have stuck to me but so long as we had Arab slave parties passing us they were not to be depended on - and they were such inveterate thieves it was quite a relief to get rid of them, though my following was reduced to nine African boys - freed ones from a school at [Nassick] Bombay. I intended to cross at the middle of the Lake, but all the Arabs fled as soon as they heard that the English were coming, and the owners of two dhows now on the Lake kept them out of sight lest I should burn them as slavers. I remained at the town of Mataka, which is on the water shed between Coast and Lake & about 50 miles from the latter. there are at least a thousand houses and he is the most

[0002]

powerful chief in the Country. I was in his district which extends to the Lake from the middle of July to the end of September. He was very anxious that some of the liberated boys should remain with him and I tried my best to induce them but in vain. He wished to be shewn how to make use of his cattle in agriculture. I promised to try & get some other boys acquainted with Indian agriculture for him. That is the best point I have seen for an influential station & Mataka shewed some sense of right when his people went without his knowledge to plunder at a part of the Lake he ordered the captives & cattle to be sent back. This was his own spontaneous act & it took place before our arrival but I accidentally saw the strangers. They consisted of fifty four women children about a dozen boys & 30 head cattle & calves. I gave him a trinket in memory of his good conduct at which he was delighted for it had not been without opposition that he carried out his orders & he shewed the token of my approbation in triumph.

Leaving the shores of the lake we endeavoured to ascend Kirk's range but the people below were afraid of those above and it was only after an old friend Katosa or Kiemasusa had turned out with his wives to carry our extra loads that we got up. It is only the edge of a plateau - peopled by various tribes of Manganja who had never been engaged in slaving - in fact they had driven away a lot of Arab slave traders a short time before. We used to think them all Maravi but Katosa is the only Maravi chief we know. The Kanthunda or "climbers" live on the mountains that rise out of the plateau. Chipeta live more on the plains there. Echewa still further North We went West among a very hospitable people till we thought we were past the longitude of the Mazitu - then turned North & all but walked into the hands of a marauding party of that people. After a rather zig-zag course we took up at the point we had left [0003]

in 1863 or say 20° west of Chimanga's - crossed the Loangwa in 12° 45' south, as it flows in the bed of an ancient Lake - and after emerging out of this great hollow ascended the plateau of Lobisa at the southern limit of 11° South. The hills on one part of it rise up to 6600 feet above the sea. While in the lowlands I could easily supply our party with meat, large game being abundant but up on these Highlands of the

Babisa none were to be found. the country depopulated by the slaving in which the people engaged is now a vast forest with here & there at wide intervals a miserable hamlet. The grain is sown in little patches in the forest & they had nothing to sell. We had now a good deal of actual gnawing hunger as day after day we trod the sloppy dripping forests which yield some wretched wild fruits & lots of mushrooms. a woman can collect a loads - 1/2 a hundred weight & after cooking pounds them into what they call porridge. but woe is me! they are good only for producing dreams of the roast beef of bygone days. they collect six kinds & reject about ten - some as large as the crown of ones hat. When we got to the Chambeze as the Zambese is here called it was true to its character of abundant animal life in its waters & on its banks we soon got an antelope. We crossed it in 10 ° 34 . It was flooded with clear water but the lines of bushy trees which shewed its actual banks were not more than forty yards apart. We came here on the last day of January - a stockaded village with three lines of defence - the inner one having a deep dry ditch round it. I think if I am not mistaken that we are on the watershed we seek between the Chambeze & Luapula. I have not had anytime to take observations as it is the rainy season and almost always cloudy but we shall rest a little here and get some flesh on our bones. We are about 10° 10 South & 31° 50 East. Alt. about 4500 feet above the sea. The Loapula or Luapula is said to be very large but I hope to send fuller information from Tanganyika.

[0004]

I have done all the hunting myself - have enjoyed good health, & no touch of fever - but we lost all our medicine - the sorest loss of goods I ever sustained. So I am hoping if fever comes to fend it off by native remedies & trust in the watchful care of a Higher Power. the chief here seems a jolly frank person but unless the country is insecure I dont see the use of his lines of circumvallation. He presented a cow on our arrival & a huge elephants tusk because I had sat on it.

I have had no news whatever from the coast since we left it but hope for letters and our second stock of goods - a small one - at Ujiji. I have been unable to send anything either - some letters I had written in hopes of meeting

an Arab slave trader but they all "skedaddled" as soon as they heard that the "English were coming I could not get any information as to the route followed by the Portuguese in going to Cazembe's till we were on the Babisa plateau. It was then pointed out that they had gone to the Westward of that which from the Loangwa valley seems a range of mountains. The makers of maps have placed [it] much too far East. The repetition of names of rivers which is common in this country probably misled them. There are four Loangwas flowing into Lake Nyassa.

Would you kindly say to Captain Richards that I had to draw some rifles & ammunition from the H.M.S. Wasp and I shall feel obliged if he makes that right. Also that Casella has given me Aneroids without a single note or hint as to their errors - not a vestige of error of either boiling point or common thermometers I tried them as the level of the sea - "Maker to the Admiralty" seems to counterbalance the care with which he used to test them all at Kew. He shall hear of it yet.

With kindest regards to Lady Murchison.

I am ever affectionately yours

David Livingstone