

Letter to Lord Palmerston, 20 October 1859

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

River Shire, 20 Oct^r 1859

[28 Feby 1860]

From D^r Livingstone in Eastern Africa

My Lord

I hope that I may not appear intrusive in again addressing you, but the effects of your efforts in the suppression of the slave trade, have attracted my attention so often I feel under a sort of obligation to let you know about them. I think too that it will afford you pleasure to hear that the prospects of benefit to both Africa and England are brightening in a direction I never dreamed of when at home. We have traced this river up to its point of departure from Lake Nyassa which though it has
[Viscount Palmerston]

[0002]

a place on the maps has hitherto been undiscovered. and we found that there are only thirty three miles of rapids to be passed when the Shire is placid again and continues so right into the Lake. This river is larger than the Clyde and has a two fathom channel from the sea up to the beginning of the cataracts in 55 ° 55. South Lat. Above them we enter into a cotton producing region of unknown extent and greatly superior to the American for here there are no frosts to cut off the crops, and foreign seed which has already been introduced by the natives themselves requires to be sown only once for regular crops during three years. The land is so arranged

too that we have great variations of climate within a few miles of each other. It consists at one part of three terraces one the Shire Valley is about 1200 feet high, and exactly like the valley of the Nile at Cairo. A second terrace is over 2000 feet and about three miles broad while a third over 12 miles in breadth is above

[0003]

3000 feet or equal to Table Mountain at the Cape often spoken of as the highest mountain in South Africa. We were travelling in the hottest season of the year but on these terraces it was pleasantly cool, and they are wonderfully supplied with running rills of deliciously cool water. On the highest terrace rises Mount Zomba which we ascended and found to be between 7000 & 8000 ft and very cold. I mention these points because one of the greatest benefits the expedition which you so kindly brought forward in the House of Commons has to shew, is the speedy cure of fever without (in general) any loss of strength to the patient. This even on the lowlands and here we have splendid sanatoria on these terraces.

But another point. Lake Shirwa or Tamandua is ninety miles long, and we could not find out where Nyassa ended. but it must be large for it had a swell on it like the sea when there was no wind, and it gives off the Shire constantly & neither river

[0004]

nor Lake vary much more than two feet in either the dry or wet season. Well they [Lakes] lie parallel to the East coast, and all the traffic to Mosambique, Anghoxia&c &c must cross at certain fords the chief of which is at the point of departure of Shire from Nyassa for then the traders can pass along the partition between the Lakes without embarking on either. We met here a large slaving party from the Interior with an immense number of slaves & elephants tusks. When they understood that we

were English they got into a ~~pucker~~ [panic] and
slipped away by night. This prestige
we owe to your Lordship. I think if
we had a small steamer on the Lake
we should very soon eat out the slave
trade, for we could develope the trade
in cotton which even now is grown
very extensively, and native traders would
not carry their ivory a month farther
for the same prices that we could give
provided we are not hampered by dues
to the Portuguese. All the mouth of the Zambesi
and all the Shire except three miles
are English discoveries. Were your Lordship
in power I have no doubt but we should
be enabled to follow up the opening we have
made. Lord Malmesbury appears to appreciate
our efforts but unfortunately I never saw him D. Livingstone