

Letter to Robert M. Livingstone, 20 February 1863

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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

River Shire 20 February

1863

My Dear Robert

In ascending this river with the Lady Nyassa in tow alongside, we had no difficulty till we got to the Elephant marsh, and there in sudden bends we found it an awkward matter to get along, for two vessels cannot be turned so quickly as one, and Lady Nyassa being pretty deep would go aground, and was very difficult to get off. Further up the river had risen only one foot eleven inches instead of about three feet, so we have lost more time than we anticipated. But no important work is ever accomplished without considerable trouble.

We found that slave hunting and famine had produced fearful effects during our absence. We counted about thirty two dead bodies floating down as we came up. The smiling villages where we could last year have bought any amount of provisions are now all burned and we saw only a few starving people trying to save themselves from starving by fishing and collecting the seeds of grasses. Indeed our work will be greatly increased for now we must get all our provisions for ourselves & workmen from great distances
[0002]

to me this retention of the slave trade is a great affliction. It destroys my hopes of benefitting the natives of the lower Shire, and I only trust that we may do some good service on Lake Nyassa. The Tette people began the work of depopulation

on our footsteps, then a half caste called Mariano devastated the country around Mount Clarendon. The loss of life has been fearful. Others have made slave forays in other directions, and no Governor interferes until the culprit is rich enough to be squeezed. He is fined and allowed to begin again at his old trade of slave hunting. The reason why no resistance can be made by the people themselves is Bows and arrows are nothing to guns and anyone with a few muskets & slaves may begin slavehunting. On the west coast Lord Palmerston put a squadron of men of war to stop the slave trade, and allow civilisation to begin its operations. Twenty missions were established, and twenty dialects reduced to writing. some twelve thousand communicants have been received into different churches, and thousands are educated. Good influences are spreading inland so that the lawful trade is increased from £20,000 per annum to between £2,000,000 & £3,000,000 More ships are employed in carrying it [0003] than ever were engaged in the slave trade. I think Lord Palmerston has done more for Africa than any man who has appeared, and he did it in spite of much misrepresentation. I have heard men say that the squadron rather increased than diminished the horrors of the slave trade, Even officers said they were doing more harm than good. He persevered in spite of it all, and is an example you should copy. Take a right course and go through with it whatever men may say or think. Well while all that was doing on the West coast, nothing has been doing here, because only a few convicts have been introduced, and we can see reason to fear that even our efforts will be frustrated. the Universities Mission is driven into an unhealthy corner by slave hunting. the parsons who joined it finding it much more difficult work than they imagined would like to be well out of it. but never

mind, others will take up the work.
The sway of Satan can't be for ever,
and He will come whose right
it is to reign. they had a number
of black men from the cape who
turned out badly, and altogether they
have found it far from being sailing
[...] [stream]. It has been uphill
work.

[0004]

As it always in at the commencement
of missions in uncivilized parts. It was
so with Grandfather Moffats mission as
you may have read in his book

We expect a M^r Jehan a missionary
and five Scotch mechanics to join us
After reading my book they resolved
to work at their trades in the Cape
colony their wages going to a common
fund. they bought a waggon and
intended to proceed over land to us
but the Governor of the Cape wrote
to ask me about sending them by
a man of war to the Zambesi and
I agreed to recieve them. They are by
trade a smith 2 masons & 2 carpenters
and should they give an example of
of industry and christian life to the
people on the Lake they may do much
good

Let your brothers and sister read this
but I don't wish it to be shewn to
others. I shall write to Oswell a good
long letter like this next. I am expecting
letters from you all soon. Think
of dear Mama as seeing you all
and above all of Jesus our Lord
who knows our hearts and all our
ways. Kiss Anna Mary for me
and may the Lord bless you all
& put you for his service