

Letter to George Grey, February 1863

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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

River Shire Feb^y1863

Dear Sir George

We have been very much baffled in our work since you left and our prospects now are far from bright. We are engaged in the transport of the steamer "the lady of the Lake" past Murchison's cataracts and while hoping to do something effectual towards stopping a stream of slaves of above 20000 annually that passes from the Lake region towards Quiloa - the Red Sea and Persian Gulph, we look back ruefully on the doings of the Portuguese behind us. It is but lately that I have come to understand their system - because during the past few years the French slave emigration was chiefly supplied by raids to the North of Quillimane and we saw but little of it, the valley of the Zambesi had previously been depopulated. Last year however the Tette people followed on our spoor - supplied one tribe with guns and ammunition to be paid in slaves - The tribe attacked fled to the Shire - famine succeeded and we saw as we ascended many dead bodies floating past the victims of famine and slave hunting. Another person engaged in slave hunting in the country adjacent to Mount Clarendon. He is a half caste and is said to possess a thousand armed slaves - flight to the river and famine have done their work lower down than where the Tette people have acted. Two others have set up slave hunting on their own responsibility and the authorities never interfere until the marauder has accumulated spoil enough to make him worth squeezing
[0002]

This system going on with the connivance of the Governors. We caught some of the Governor of Tette's own slaves at it. It seems evident that the good efforts expected from the operations of the cruisers cannot be

realized. In the West great success has attended their efforts in the way the promoters of the suppression policy intended - the slave trade was repressed for a time to allow the influences of Christianity to extend inland. At least 20 missions have been established, an equal number of dialects have been reduced to writing, thousands are educated, about 12000 communicants are members of the different churches, and lawful trade has extended from £20000 annually to between £2,000,000 and £3000000. Indeed a greater amount of tonnage is now engaged in legal trade than was formerly employed in that in slaves. But on this coast it is still the old system of paltry peddling in ivory and gold dust and slaving as often as there is opportunity. If none but a few convict Portuguese had been allowed to enter the West the same results would have followed as here - and unless the navigation of the Zambesi & Shire is made free to all nations I doubt whether we can effect much when the passions of these Africans are enlisted on the side of wrong the case is difficult. Fortunately we have in Earl Russell a man who will do all that can be done to promote freedom of both black and white. And in Lord Palmerston who is pre eminently the author of the [0003]

the suppression policy we have one who has done more for the good of Africa than any one who can be mentioned. Being under him one cannot speak out all that is felt in reviewing his long & unwearied labours for the abolition of the slave trade, without appearing to be a toady and that does not lie in my line. I hope that something may be done and think the Portuguese might yield it as they never use the mouths of the Zambesi or Shire at all.

The death of bishop Mackenzie was a great misfortune as it created as a prejudice, and half of the exposure [in England] he subjected himself to would have led to his being quickly cut off by consumption. We have had our losses too from being compelled to delay a long time in a most unhealthy locality, but these cases

are accidental. We have the prospect
of half a dozen Scotch mechanics joining
us soon. They worked at their trades
in Shival North and M^r Burnet the
commissioner gives a good report
of them. Their wages went to a common
fund out of which waggons were bought
and they were ready to proceed overland
when the Governor asked me if they
might not rather be sent by sea. They
seem just the men we want and
I have recommended them to try
and set an example of independent
industry and Christian life before
the inhabitants of the Lake.
[0004]

We went up the Rovuma about
156 miles or 114 as the crow flies during
September & October last. People near the
coast unfriendly but further inland
all we could expect, the lands on each
bank rise up 400 or 500 feet - the edge
of a plateau though they look like ranges
of hills - the country well wooded & fertile, pieces of coal seen in the sands
but tsetse prevails, the river takes
us twice on to the slave route from
Nyassa to Quiloa - we turned at some
low rapids about eleven Arab days
from Lake Nyassa. One day above our
turning point the Rovuma is joined
by the Liendi which rises on the mountains
East of the Lake. Rovuma is still said
to come out of it as formerly but the
passage is narrow and down rocks
this will be our outlet rather than pay
dues to Portuguese but it is hard to
leave the route we opened & rendered
safe to vile slave hunters.

I am glad to hear from our Friend
Maclear that you are succeeding in
your labours. You have our heartiest
good wishes. If you still wish to do
us a good turn write a line for
a word from you is ever valuable
and exhilarating Believe me

Affectionately Yours

David Livingstone