

Letter to John Washington, 4 February 1860

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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

If you can state to M^r Rae positively that the Government either will or will not grant a new steamer - it will save time & oblige me

Tette, 4 Feb^y 1860

Private

My Dear Captain Washington

I have resolved to allow M^r Rae to go home. This vessel is done, and should another be on the way she will have her own engineer. Rae will be able to do us more good by going home than by stopping, for if allowed to carry out my views of what ought to be done in this country a more trustworthy person could not be found to give effect to our arrangements. He returns therefore on duty & will come straight to you in London. A conversation with him will give you a clearer idea of our prospects than any amount of letter writing. You spoke to him at Liverpool and he has regretted ever since that he did not know you or he would have let you know how shabbily we were being served. He has collections of plants in charge for Kew and two live *Lepidosirens* for Professor Owen.

As I mentioned before a small vessel capable of being unscrewed at the bottom of the cataracts and carried to the smooth part above, seems necessary

[0002]

to give us a proper footing in the slave market of Nyassa. Once there I have no doubt but we should soon eradicate the slave trade over a large district. D^r Kirk M^r C. Livingstone & Rae have but one opinion on this point. Personally, I am glad that the capabilities of the region

we have opened do not rest on my
testimony alone. And if I am rightly informed
Burton and Speke confirm my views
It is indispensable that we be entirely
independent of the Portuguese. Their stations
are not colonies but small penal settlements
No women are sent out, and the moral
atmosphere is awful. I question if there are
five upright men in the country, and there
is not a man woman nor child in it,
without the venereal either hereditary or
acquired. Hence the necessity of one
steamer capable of navigating the lower
Zambesi and the Cape while another remains
on the lakes. Bedingfeld inflicted no end of
harm on the Expedition in rejecting the
Bann, but what could a landsman like me
do but acquiesce. It would have suited us
exactly but he certainly could not have
navigated her out.

We think that the proposed vessel should
be unscrewed into pieces of 500lbs each - that
she should have an engine of at least 40 horse power
[0003]

- draw not more than 30 inches yet
come out herself. Mr Rae has knowledge
of vessels which his employers sent out
to Australia of that draught. He is highly
esteemed by the Mess^{rs} Tod & Macgregor
of Glasgow and his status is much
higher than what he occupies here.
We ought to have a condensing engine
with a screw, and a strong substantial
hull. Two scotch carts and a couple
of mules from the Cape would
enable us to place her on Nyassa
in three months from her arrival. If we
could have half a dozen sappers and
miners so much the better. I have
submitted the proposition to Lord John
Russell. If he declines it, then I shall
get it from my own funds. My
children are provided for, so far as
education is concerned, and I do not
know a more noble object in
which to employ some of the money
got by the book than this. If Govern-
ment saw the thing in the light I do
no difficulty would be made - but
if not I think it clear that the plan

ought to be proceeded with and M^r Rae
is instructed to that effect. I wish
[0004]
you to examine him freely about everything
He is cautious in his statements and
every word may be depended on. He will
make a model of the kind of vessel we
need and submit it to you. His superintendence
would ensure everything being done in a
workmanlike manner, but you are
not required to employ him unless
that course should commend itself to
your own judgement. If kept on I suppose
his salary would require to be equal to P & O Company's

We lost a mail bag on the bar off
Kongone and are quite in the dark about
what you are or have been doing - not
a word from you though I am sure you
have written. The passage in has a
bend in it. It lies to the left or West
of the island in the mouth of the harbour
and is quite safe for 2/3^{ds} of each month
at least. We got Captain Berkeley to put
up another beacon and when the two are
in line you have the passage or deep
channel. Fortunately no lives were lost
but if any one will go well to the West
of the island he cannot miss the channel
and will lose nothing. The mail was lost
on shoal 1. Bedingfeld

nearly lost the launch
on shoal 2. in the accom-
panying rude sketch - + is a
canal which leads into the
Luabo near the sea.

[0005]
It came to my knowledge in Nov^r last, that
Captain Gordon of H. M. S. Hermes had written
a letter to C^r Bedingfeld impugning my
veracity. I happened to be writing to Captain
Gordon at the time, and added the following
postscript which I think you ought to see.

P.S. 3 Nov. 1859. I was actually engaged in
writing the foregoing sheet when a mail arrived
containing your "copy of a letter to C^r Bedingfeld"
My object in writing was chiefly to shew
that I gratefully remembered your services
while with us as after our separation;

and as after conduct does not blot out the pleasant recollection of your really hearty good will to the Expedition, I still venture to send it, and to say that nothing would delight me more than rendering some service to you or yours in return.

A few points seemed to have escaped your memory and as they might have modified your judgement in penning your letter they may without offence be recalled. "The practicable passage", for instance, was not "discovered by the Launch" but by M^r Skead in your own cutter. Having been absent with him on that service, our grounding ~~with him~~ during the night prevented my being on the spot when the Launch came round from the Luave - but I was informed in the presence of a witness by one who ought [0006] to have known, that the fault was his own in mistaking the proper passage across the bar, and sending Bedingfeld where in defiance of signals made by Mr C. Livingstone on the beach he went broadside on to the breakers. (this was Captain Gordon himself)

You assert that C^t Bedingfeld's proper place was the steam Launch; you did not recollect that she was not a man of war and possibly did not know that the pointed instructions of H. M. Government which I read to him in the presence of the whole Expedition; and also furnished him with a copy thereof under my own hand, assigned him the place of sounding the bar in the whalers made expressly for that service. Such instructions are paramount and as the same authority declared that no naval officer would be allowed to interfere with Capⁿ Duncan in his management of the Pearl, your next allegation is equally injudicious

You have omitted altogether the occasion of Bedingfeld's resignation, and tacked it on to a matter which had no connection with it. You may have been ignorant of the restrictions under which he was placed but he was not. Had you been charged to

protect C.ⁿ Duncan as I was, I believe that your ideas of obedience would have led you to perform your duty exactly as I did, though perhaps not so quietly.

[0007]

(When the Pearl was aground Gordon watching the screw observed that the water retired some inches, before it was high water. He complained to me that Duncan had allowed the opportunity of getting her off to pass. As I had been observing a steady rise at the waist I suggested that her stern might have lifted. He burst into a towering passion with Duncan, roared out that he would stake his reputation as an officer of 30 years standing &c. &c. The water was found to be actually rising still, and she floated and got off an hour after the scene. Gordon however handsomely apologized to Duncan for his rudeness)

"The frivolous and ridiculous events" (reasons?) to which you deign not to allude are so for the same reasons that Botany and geology are frivolous and ridiculous to the people among whom we travel. In the latter case the ignorance is excusable. Had I added a word or two more the case would have appeared clear, but this production of yours amply justifies the caution I exercised. (Note Bedingfeld was labouring under irritable bladder, the most intractable of all the sequelae of syphilis. In England he was obliged to wear a gutta percha tube in order to relieve himself in the public streets unpercieved. Here there was superadded irritable bowels, and any one conversant with these complaints can understand whether it was "frivolous or ridiculous" to refer some of his folly to these causes. But I never

[0008]

alluded to them except in an indirect manner and in a way that would not affect his character)

You have constituted yourself the fourth witness to the fact of an altercation on board the Pearl after my pointed injunction to the contrary. I made no charge without evidence from credible witnesses accompanying it - and am sorry to see that you imagine your mere dicta and "belief" on hearsay could subvert point blank

evidence. You cannot be a witness to
respecting the putridity exposed to view
after Bedingfeld was turned off, you
being I believe at the time in Simon's Bay.
You did not hear Bedingfeld "quietly"
"remonstrate" for by no rule of
interpretation can the assertion that the
"rivet heads are rusting off" "She will
never reach Tette if you go down to the
bar" &c. be called quiet remonstrance.
I had orders from H. M. Government
to see the Pearl safely down to the Bar,
and had promised to obey - but it is
marvellous to you that I should wish
to get back my promise before consenting
to go up river instead. You ought,
my friend to have known all these
points before committing yourself. A
vessel painted inside and out with
Peacock's patent on the voyage out,
[0009]
with her rivet heads rusting off after
only one month's service, was such
a palpable stupid story, you could
not have stomached it either. Again
you are altogether mistaken about
the letter. It was written at once on
receiving B's first resignation
copied by M^r C. Livingstone &
read by my second in command;
but I delayed delivery, believing
that "I would not be doing as
I would wish to be done by if I did
not give B. time to reflect" this
is what I told you, and you
kindly offered to "mediate". but I
had never quarrelled. It was a
question of delivery or non delivery
entirely

D. Livingstone

I have said nothing offensive
or intentionally so, but I consider
it quite unjustifiable in you
to accuse me of ingratitude to
the navy - some of your statements
are insulting enough but you don't
thereby disparage the whole consular service

A true copy D.L.

[0010]

(Note. I would not have troubled you on this subject again as I meant to have allowed it to drop, but we hear that Bedingfeld has been going about London shewing Gordon's letter. And he repeatedly declared that anything could be got out of the Admiralty by boring the "Old fools" I think it well for you to know that Gordon allowed himself to be persuaded he knew matters of which he positively had no knowledge. He was tried by court martial after he left us, and were he examined on the points he now has written upon, would appear to no greater advantage than he did there. I am satisfied that a great deal of the disfavour in which the Admiralty stands is owing to the depreciation of their own officers - Bedingfeld declared repeatedly on board the Pearl "that he got a steamer because he never studied steam"

[0011]

"that the Admiralty discouraged all scientific acquirements" and any thing could be got out of them by only plaguing them long enough. It was impossible for Duncan to respect a person talking in this way, and then followed the hatred in which when Gordon joined my situation was uncomfortable enough.

On another disagreeable subject I neglected to call your attention to the difference of statement between M^r John Laird and M^r Macgregor Laird. Macgregor promised that she would carry Ten or Twelve Tons. John says she was to carry a very few persons. Macgregor promised over rather than below Ten knots. John blames me for preventing her speed by loading

[0012]

her up to 2 feet. Now without gear
fuel, luggage, food or even water
in the boiler, she draws 23 inches
her paddle floats being 10 inches too
deep. The fact of the matter is that
Macgregor's mad idea of turning
her up at each end upset all their
calculations. The Niger canoes are
made so to avoid the shock which
they would otherwise give on coming
to the banks. The bend allows them
to slide up. With us the bend increases
the draught and does not make her turn
more quickly. He would not have
made this "mule" with his own money.
By the engineer of H. M. S. Lynx I am
conformed in the statement that it is
a low pressure cylinder applied to a
high pressure engine. One side [of the boiler] remains
long cool after the other is hot: and
it is not true that a pipe serves the
purpose of a steam chest in marine
engines.

He presumed largely on people's ignorance in saying that a pipe serves instead
It is probable that the boiler too was made for a land engine from being without a steam
chest The authority for saying that
the cylinder was the sweepings of the
shop, was M^r Laird's own foreman,
but we do not mention that publicly as
it might hurt the man. From M^r
Rae you may learn further particulars

I am &c David Livingstone