Letter to The Earl of Clarendon, 18 May 1866

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[0001]
Ngomano. 18 May.
1866
Copy
No 2
geographical
My Lord,
When we could not discover a
path for camels thro' the mangrove
swamps of the mouths of the Rovuma
we proceeded about 25 miles to the N.
of that river, & at the bottom of Nikindany,
Bay entered a beautiful landlocked
harbour called Kinday or Pemba. The
entrance seems not more than 300
yards wide, & of these about 150 are deep;
the reef on each side of the channel
shewing so plainly of a light colour that
no ship ought to touch. The harbour is
somewhat of the shape of the "spade" on
cards, the entrance being like the short
handle. There is a mile nearly of space
for anchorage, the Southern part being
from 10 to 14 fathoms, while the N.W. portion
is shallow and rocky. It is a first-rate
harbour for Arab Dhows, the land rising nearly
all round from 200 to 300 feet. The water is
so calm, they can draw their craft to the
shore to discharge & take in cargo. They are also
completely screened by the masses of trees
growing all round it from sea-ward
observation.
The Earl of Clarendon K. G.
The

[0002]
The population consists of coast
Arabs & their slaves. The six villages
in wh^{h} they live are dotted round the
shore, & may contain 300 souls in all.
They seemed to be suspicious & but for our
having been accompanied by H.M.S.

"Penguin" would have given trouble. The ordinary precaution of placing a sentry over our exposed goods caused a panic & the sirkar or headman thought that he gave a crushing reply to my explanations, when he bluttered out "But we have no thieves here!"

Our route hence was S.S.W. to the Rovuma, wh^{h} we struck at the spot marked on the chart as that wh^{h} the "Pioneer" turned in 1861. We travelled over the same plateau that is seen to flank both sides of the Rovuma like a chain of hills from 400 to 600 feet high. Except where the natives, who are called Makoude, have cleared spaces for cultivation the whole country within the influences of the moisture from the ocean is covered with dense jungle. The trees in general are not large, but planted so closely together as generally to exclude the sun. In many places they may be said to

[0003]

to be woven together by tangled masses of climbing plants, more resembling the ropes and cables of a ship in inextricable confusion than the graceful creepers with wh^{h} we are familiar in northern climates. They gave the impression of being remnants of the carboniferous period by geologists, and the huge Pachydermata of that time were the only beings that could wriggle thro' them. Trade paths have already been made, but we had both to heighten & widen them for camels & buffaloes. The people at the sea-coast had declared that no aid could be got from the natives. When we were seven miles off, we were agreeably surprised to find that for reasonable wages we could employ any number of carriers & wood-cutters we desired. As they were accustomed to clearing away the gigantic climbers for their garden ground, they whittled away with their tomahawks with remarkable speed & skill. Two days' continuous hard labour was as much as they could stand. It is questionable whether

any people (except possibly the Chinese)
Wh[h] are not meat-eaters can endure
continuous

[0004]
continuous labour of a kind that
brings so many muscles into violent
action as this work did. French navvies
could not compete with the English,
until they were fed exactly like the
latter. The Makoude have only fowls, a
few goats, & the chance of an occasional
gorge of the wild hog of the country.

Little can be said about the
appearance of the country. By the
occasional glimpses we got it seemed
covered with great masses of dark
green foliage, except where the
bamboos gave a lighter tint, or a
sterculia had changed it's leaves to
yellow in anticipation of winter. The
path we followed sometimes went
along or across a "wady", in which we
were smothered by the grass overhead.

Such rocks as we could see w~~h~~ere
undisturbed grey sandstone, capped by
ferruginous conglomerate. Upon this we
often stumbled against blocks of
silicified wood, so like the recent, that
any one would be unwilling to believe at
sight that they were stones. This is a
sure

[0005]
sure indication here of coal being
underneath, & pieces of it were met in
the sands of the river

When about 90 miles from the mouth
of the Rovuma, the geological structure
changes, & with this change we have more
open forest - Thermier vegetation & more
reasonable grasses. The chief rock is
new Syanite, & patches of fine white dolomite
lie upon it in spots. Granitic masses
have been shot up over the plain wh[h]
extends in front all the way to Nyonano -
the confluence of the Rovuma or Louma
& Loendi. In the drier country we found
that one of those inexplicable droughts had

happened over the north Bank of the
Rovuma & a tribe of Mazite or Mazitu
probably Zulus had come down like a
swarm of locusts & spread away all the
food above & in the ground. I had now
to make forced marches with the Makoude
in quest of provisions for my party, &
am now with Matumora or Machumora,
the chief at Ngomano, & by sending some
20 miles to the South West I shall soon
succour them. This is the point of confluence
as

[0006]
as the name Ngomanoor or Ngomano
implies, of the Louma & Loendi. The
Loendi is decidedly the parent stream, &
comes from the S.W., where in addition to
some bold granitic peaks the dim outline of
distant highlands appears. Even at that
distance they raise the spirits, but possibly
that is caused partly by the fact that this
is about 30 miles beyond our former
turning-point and the thresh~~h~~old of
the unexplored.

I propose to make this my head-
quarters till I have felt my way round
Lake Nyassa. If prospects are fair there
I need not return, but trust to another
quarter for fresh supplies, but it is best
to say little about the future. Matumora
is an intelligent man, & one well-known
to be trustworthy. He is appealed to on all
hands for his wise decisions, but he has
not much real power beyond what his
character gives him.

The Makoude are all independent of
each other - but not devoid of a natural
sense of justice. A carrier stole a shirt
from

[0007]
from one of my men. Our guide pursued
him at night - seized him in his own house
and the elders of his village made him pay
about 4 times the value of the article stolen.
No other case of theft occurred. No dues
were demanded, and only one fine - a very
just one - was levied. Attempts have been

made to make the Arabs pay, but they have always been resisted.

So much has been said about Arab prose by him, that it was with interest inquiries were made about their success in converting the Makoude to the Mahometan faith. Here as elsewhere no attempts to teach had been made. Some Arabs asserted that it would be useless for the Makoude had no idea of a Deity. In making inquiries about the Gum-Copal digging, I was shewn a tree from wh^{h} the gum was actually dropping, but they do not dig under the trees at present living. They choose the vicinity, in the belief that near to the modern trees those which yielded what is now considered fossil gum must have grown. Here they dig; "and", said that spokesman, "the first and second

[0008]
second days we may labour in vain, but God may give it us after that." To this acknowledgment of a Deity all responded. "It is as He wills it. "

The experiment with the buffaloes and Tsetse has not been satisfactory; one buffalo and two camels died. Had we not been in a Tsetse Country, I would have ascribed this to overwork and bruises received on board the Dhow wh^{h} brought them from Zanzibar. These broke out into large ulcers. The symptoms were not those I have observed in oxen and horses. When stung by gadflies, blood of the arterial colour flows from the point. This may be the effect of the Tsetse, for when an ox known to be bitten was killed it's blood was all of the arterial hue. I had but 4 buffaloes for the Experiment, & as yet, as 3 remain, I remain in doubt.

Hoping that this short sketch which I write in haste for an Arab who is passing down to the coast may be approved,

I am &c

/signed/ David Livingstone

Earl of Clarendon