

Letter to Adam Sedgwick, 24 August 1866, 1 February 1867

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Lake Nyassa 24 August 1866

My very Dear Friend

I have taken a sore longing

to write to you though I have not the faintest prospect of being able to send a letter to the sea coast. The Arab slave traders on their way thither avoid me as if I had the plague. In six or seven cases they set off across country as soon as they heard that the English were coming - and dashing through bush and brake here is a more serious affair than with you for the grass is generally over ones head in the hollows - as thick as a quill in the stalk & often intertwined with creepers - I would fain have spared the slaves who were thus dragged, but the masters took care not to look me in the face. One sagacious old leader who had about 800 slaves in his party, hearing that after a march of eight days through a fine country completely depopulated by the slave trade, we were nearly famished, and that we were just at hand, came forward & presented a bag of flour and an ox. I daresay he had some genuine goodness in him though it looked like taking the "bull by the horns," for I had only three or four of the strongest of our party, and we were making a forced march in order to purchase & send back provisions to the weaker still behind but this was the only chance we had of sending a letter, and our friend could not wait till we had written. He was beginning that long march which we had just finished, and every hour to him was precious.

To give you an idea of the country it is a gradual slope from the coast up to within forty or fifty miles of this Lake. The first 80 miles or so are covered with dense forest, the only bare spaces being the clearings of the inhabitants. the rock where it can be seen is coarse grey sandstone with blocks of salicified wood lying on it. This overlies coal. Beyond the sandstone we came on gneiss and sometimes granite. There the forest is scraggy but it is still so thickly planted that one can rarely see the horizon. About 200 miles inland the country becomes undulating and on the crests of the waves one sees mountains all around - great rounded granitic masses - igneous rocks appear among these masses and large patches of ferruginous conglomerate are

met with. The country is still rich in soil but the trees are small as we attain greater altitude - and the number of running rills in the mountainous district is quite astonishing. I counted in one day's

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march no fewer than fifteen flowing burns - These are the sources of the Rovuma. The watershed between it and the Lake rises up to 3400 [& even 4000 ft] feet. This elevated region is just Magomero magnified, and to this poor bishop Mackenzie hoped to extend his mission - I had to wear my thickest flannels. The water though only 61° felt much too cold to bathe in. Cattle shewed that no tsetse exists, and large patches of English peas in full bearing shewed how English vegetables could flourish. The most influential chief on these highlands is Mataka of Ajawa or Waiyou extraction. Some of his people had without his knowledge gone to the Lake and carried off a number of cattle & people. Mataka had ordered them to be taken back before we arrived, but I accidentally saw the party. The women & children numbered 54. the young men and boys about a dozen, but they were [then] employed among the cattle which were about 80 head in all - this spontaneous act was the more creditable inasmuch as he has been subjected to none but slave trading influences. And all through this region the process which bishop Mackenzie stemmed goes on annually - The Ajawa or Waiyou make the forays, and the Arabs furnish the powder & guns - I look at this fine region fast becoming depopulated with feelings of inexpressible sadness - We allow the Zanzibar slave trade within certain limits, and the effect of this license is, that insignificant island is a great slave emporium and hundreds of miles of a far finer country is annually swept of crowds of people - our mission there is virtually gagged - The Sultan is all civility & flattery but no missionary progress can be allowed among his bigotted Mahometans - and then about half the missionary strength must always be absent in quest of health. It is almost enough to make bp Mackenzie turn round in his grave to find his mission degraded to a mere chaplaincy of a consulate - and I fear that there is no hope of seeing central Africa occupied by its mission in our day. I was very much delayed by want of provisions, and by the laziness of some sepoys whom I had to dismiss but the easy boating of about three weeks [to Magomero] will bear no comparison to the few months hard toil we had in coming here. When we see how bigotted & unfriendly the coast tribes are how friendly the people in the interior prove themselves I conclude that Africa must be Christianized from within.

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Wherever a path may be found I can conceive of none superior to that by the Shire. It is true we lost valuable lives - the Arab who proved our friend in need told me as a piece of news the Kilwa(Quilloa) slave traders had lost one hundred of their number in one sickly year. I saw several of their graves, and surely the church can afford to spend lives in saving as freely as others can in destroying. But after all I have hopes in the church yet and I cannot believe that all the hopes prayers and sympathies which clustered around my poor Dear friend are to go into thin air.

I ought to have mentioned that on the highest part of the watershed we had mica schist - and then when we come down here the gneiss is thrust away from the Lake & tilted right on edge. the strata often dipping quite perpendicularly but I can see no agent that thus thrust it away. It felt like coming to an old home to see Nyassa again and dash in the rollers of its delicious waters - I was quite exhilarated by the roar of this inland sea. The people have generally been friendly with us - though from their intercourse with coast Arabs they have learned some of their ways suspicion has not taken root. I have not yet learned that any Arab has endeavoured to propagate Mahometanism. their zeal for that faith seems to have perished and without being uncharitable I don't think they have much of it themselves.

I have been rather surprised at finding an undoubted testimony that even where polygamy has free scope the venereal disease is rampant. Two English medical officers assured me that they had seen nothing like its prevalence in Europe. One of these officers was so scandalized on finding what we call respectable married men with it that he threatened to complain to the Sultan. this says little for polygamy.

I have several times recollected a remark made by the Dean of Ely in your house that he might be able to do something to promote the education of my children. I did not think much about it at the time but it has since struck me that if I had the opportunity I would tell him that I shall esteem it a great kindness if he in any way remembers them. I am rather oddly situated as to friends. I have a great many sincere true hearted ones for whose favour I feel very grateful - to

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them for their favour and to Him who disposes their hearts to feel kindly towards me. but again & again I have been left in the lurch. One mentions some new

and most interesting book - "I would have sent it" he adds "but you have so many friends, I am sure some one must have sent it." So with news. They are sure some of my "many friends" must have given all. As he mentioned education spontaneously it seemed as if he were not one of the many who feel that others are so much more liberal than themselves. I have one son at Glasgow college sixteen years of age - another at a private school in Hamilton about ten years of age Should the Dean wish any information about them Professor Andrew Buchanan of Glasgow would supply it - or James Young - Limefield - West Calder - Scotland * another of their gaurdians. The Dean may have nothing at his disposal but I do not value his kindly feelings the less and I am sure that you will excuse my asking you to give the above information at your leizure. I think of you as I saw you last at Norwich and beg you present my salaam to Mary Bell and to any of your Boquet of flowers you may get. I leave a little space to fill up when I see a prospect of sending a letter

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 I have been a long time in working up to what is probably the watershed I seek - 4500 feet above the sea & the Loapula in front. A hungry time we had in passing through the dripping forests of the Babisa country - no animals to be shot and the people had no grain to sell. Mushrooms in plenty though but woes me good only for exciting dreams of the roast beef of bygone days - no salt either This causes the gnawing sensation to be ceaseless but we got through by God's great mercy. Sugar we have forgotten all about & roast a little grain to make believe it is coffee but we have got to a land of plenty & are going to have our christmas feast tomorrow We had nothing to celebrate it when the day passed but wont we talked of it for all that. I am excessively lean but take on fat kindly as do some races of pigs. I have heard nothing of home since we left the coast but pray that the Most High may keep all my dear friends & relatives among I am glad to place my very dear
 Professor A Sedgwick I am
 David Livingstone

* It is possible that you may know M^r Young by report - formerly my teacher in chemistry - has made a fortune by Paraffin oil & is a fine straight forward good man.