

Letter to William C. Oswell, 4 April 1856

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Tete or Nyungwe on the

Zambesi. East Africa

4th April 1856

Mr Dear Mr Oswel

I now begin a letter to you after having written to many others from this place not because I think it necessary for I hope soon to have viva voce communication with you, but to ease my conscience of a feeling that it was not right to make you among the last. I would not write while in Angola for dysentery reduced me very low then all my letters maps &c. which were penned in much weakness went to the bottom in the mail packet and I had to employ as much of the time I could spare in returning to Cassange in repairing that loss. I almost expected you at Loanda but not having recieved a single letter from England while there though I requested my friends to address to that city, I suppose you must have concluded like others that I should never reach it. I would have been very glad of your company though from having been sorely tried by a missionary companion once, I never feel disposed to despond in prospect of being alone. Londa would have been miserable for you as well as it was for me. for there is no game larger than mice, not a vulture even not a crow, and the food is nearly pure starch Manioc meal and roots with occasionally that you know as Lobebelebe. the lower

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part of the person wetted two or three times daily in passing streams which are unlike any I ever saw before. the stream itself may be

from 6 to 10 feet broad only but that or more in depth, and it flows in a marsh of from 100 to 500 yards broad. this is covered over with tufts of grass separated from one to three or four feet from each other. the intervening spaces are covered with a pellicle of tender water plants. If you step right on the top of the bunch of grass, all right but they are often conical and one steps on the side and down he goes up to the thigh in soft black slush. the oxen had generally all four legs down at once and how they got through at all seems quite wonderful. the stream is nothing as it generally had a bridge over it but the bogs were terrible and delayed us very much. It is a remarkably well watered country. Bogs however and forest will prevent waggons from traversing it anywhere near our path. On this account I came back to try this side and you will be glad to hear I am thus far on my way down.

We reached this a month ago pretty well tired. I assure you for tsetse destroyed all the oxen and not having wherewithal to buy a canoe I had to march on foot. We had plenty of game all the way and the men killed some with their assegais I was very unsuccessful from being unable to steady the gun. I never saw anything like the numbers of elephants and buffaloes we had on the Kafue which is the name of the Bashuk river near the confluence, and all wonderfully tame. Pigs by families stood looking at us often and lions are so abundant the natives

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make all their garden huts on trees. they don't kill them as their chiefs pretend to become meta -

morphosed into those animals. The inhabitants are very numerous compared to what we have seen in the south, and are a strong muscular race of negroes. the tsetse preventing them from possessing cattle. they delight much in agriculture and the soil being very fertile they can raise immense quantities of grain. their laws are very stringent you would scarcely relish that respecting elephants and eilands. the half which [...]

[...] ground belongs to the Lord of the soil &

[...] cannot take his portion even

[...] comes and gives him permission

[...] lying tusk alone is his. they

have[...] fighting for the last two years
with [...] Portuguese and burned up all the
surrounding villas and many of houses
of Tete itself. Indeed Tete is in ruins. So
D^o Quilimane not much better. Senior is
buffeted by true caffres here called
Landeens. (Landinis). the population on
the Eastern side of the continent possesses much
of the Zulu character, and is unlike the poor
cowardly Bechuanas whom some honour
with the Caffre name. I could never avoid
laughing in my sleeve to hear Murray for
instance say "these Kyaffres" as if he really
were near any of those "magnificent savages"
they were headed by two men of Portuguese and
Asiatic extraction and are unconquered still.
Trade is nearly quite stagnant though elephants
abound close to this and even lower down

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there is abundance of gold, coal and iron
the country is fertile producing everything except
tea. the river is magnificent. At the foot it
was measured at 500 fathoms or 1000 yards
and it is often broader. but becomes spoiled
among the deltas near Quilimane. It is very
deadly there too. Indeed I have waited a month
here in order to pass through the deltas in a
better month than march. I then go to England.

I have never received a line from you since
you went to England. You must be very
busy surely. Are you in Love or What?
Got but one short note from my wife,
from others nothing. they must all have
been thinking I was dead and well out
of the way. Believe me your very

Affectionate David Livingstone

William Cotton Oswel, Esquire
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