

Letter to George Grey, 19 February 1859

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

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[0001]

Tette 19th February 1859

Private

My Dear Sir George

In my last I told
you of our visit to Kebra basa
and I am happy now to be able
to inform you that it has been
visited again since the water
began to rise and the reports
of M^r C. Livingstone and M^r
Baines fully confirm what
I advanced as to effect of a
flood. Several of the cataracts
which at low water seemed
very serious obstacles are
rendered so smooth that but
for the adjacent mountains
having been sketched they
would not have been recognized
[0002]

but a steamer capable of stemming
the main current is necessary for
the ascent. The river is now 15 feet
above low water mark in November
and as it is expected to rise considerably
more

I felt inclined to take advantage
of it and haul this vessel through
but besides the risk of doubling her
up she can carry so little cargo
we would soon be without
supplies after we had succeeded.
We shall therefore work for a while
on this side the rapid, and as a
beginning I may mention that
we went up the Shire about the
beginning of January and found
it a good navigable river for
at least one hundred miles from
its confluence. The Mountain

Morambala is 4000 ft high and
has a wonderfully well cultivated
large top. Lemon trees grow quite
wild in the woods & so do oranges
& pine apples. There are several
[0003]
fine little fountains with water slightly
chalybeate - the people independent &
very hospitable. The view from the
top of the Shire winding across an
extended plain inhabited by real
Lotophagi is magnificent and
as you may judge from the
height we have quite a different
climate from that of the plains
The vegetation is very like that
of Londa & Angola. We have
also a fine hot sulphureous
fountain at the base (174°) yet
no advantage has been taken of
this splendid sanatorium by the Portuguese. The valley of the Shire
at one part abounds in Elephants
and if you come to see us
about January I undertake to
shew five hundred of these noble
animals grazing on one plain
We saw more than that - and as
there are branches of the river which
form islands we sometimes chased
them with this vessel. They had
magnificent tusks. I think that they
are attracted down from the hills by
the sweet fruit of wild Palmyras of
which there are fine forests there.
The people were very suspicious
of us never having been visited
by Europeans before but treated
us civilly. Our wooding parties
were never molested - yet a
gaurd was set over us both night
and day. They are well armed
with bows and poisoned
arrows. The women insert an
ornament exactly the size and
shape of the rings for table napkins
into the upper lip - the effect
is frightful. It is a most unaccountable
ornament. They cultivate largely on
the upper third of the Shirevally
and we purchased abundance of
provisions at a cheap rate besides

specimens of their cotton & cotton yarn
[0004]

They have two kinds of cotton and
both very good in quality.

Our first object was to
gain their confidence and
seeing them so suspicious,
though we had pretty certain
information of the Shire
becoming smooth again
beyond the cataract which
stopped our progress and
that Arabs from Zanzibar
were in the habit of coming
down in canoes from
Lake Nyanja we thought
it imprudent to leave the
vessel in their power
and go overland. We leave
them to allow our first
visit to have its effect
and in the course of a
month return to them again

[0005]

The reason why the Portuguese
have not gone farther up than
about Marambala is probably
the steady rapidity of the current
(2 1/2 knots) there are no still
reaches and with the heavy Zambesi
canoes it is difficult to get on
in a current. The people too
have a bad name - they are
said to have killed some native
traders. In 1856 when I was
coming down past the mouth
of the Shire I was told that an
expedition had been sent up
but was unable to go far because
the river was blocked up with
duckweed - quantities of that were
then coming out of the river
but at 25 miles from the
confluence the duckweed ceases
so the Expedition could not have gone far

[0006]

Above that the river widens a
little but it is free from sand banks
and deep. Indeed it may be said
to be superior to the Zambesi

for steam navigation. We could
go on at night even.

This is our most unhealthy
season. Fever is fatal on
the coast. Here we have some
of it but no one dies in
consequence. Three of our
party have had touches of it
but are better. This is the
edge of the high healthy lands
where I have still every reason
to believe that Europeans
might live in safety. We are
longing somewhat for news
having recieved none
except the papers you were
kind enough to send us by
the Lynx.
[0007]

I have litle hopes of doing any good
with the people under or in contact with
the Portuguese. A year or more must
elapse ere they recover from the
effects of their late war - but I think
more highly of the capabilities of the
country for the produce England
stands most in need of than ever
I could collect a waggon load or two
of Indigo from the streets of Tette
tomorrow. D^r Kirk made some
with it and cotton though burned
down annually springs up ~~annually~~
as brisk as ever. The people here
make sugar, of this I was not aware
before. We have put up our little
engine to shew what machinery
can do: her first work was to saw
up planks to make a boat, which
Major Secard our best friend was
about to build. We try sugar [cane] as soon
as it is ready to cut

I am &c

David Livingstone

I have been trying to get the Lord's prayer
as translated by the Jesuits into Tette dialect

A Rev^d D^r Russel of Maynooth College gave me a Bunda poem from Angola. I think if you could apply through him to the college at Goa, India you would get some thing in this dialect

I have got a portion of the Lord's prayer - & Ave Maria from an old blind woman. Another old lady here remembers the two black traders coming here from Angola on whom the Portuguese lay their claims for having crossed the continent - they never went to the coast so she says