

## Letter to George Grey, 4, [8 or 9] April 1861

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[0001]

Mohilla Island, near Comoro

4 April 1861.

My Dear Sir George

You will probably have heard ere this reaches you that we went to the Rovuma in February and made an attempt to ascend that river in March. Our progress was arrested when only some thirty miles from the mouth by observing that the water was falling at the rate of seven inches a day; we had come over some parts not more than five or six feet deep and our vessel was drawing four & a half feet so we had to make up our minds whether to proceed further and remain among a people whom we do not know till next flood, or come back and work on our old "spoon" up the Shire. The detention would have been such a waste of time for those who remained at Johanna, & would not have advanced the objects of those who had come to Rovuma more effectually than by spending the same period up the Shire: For the general good therefore we returned and were favoured by a rise in the river of three or four feet - this last is said to be the last flood of the year. And [0002] made us fully alive to the fact that from one canoe or another we were quite two months too late for successful exploration.

From the little that we saw we are disposed to think favourably of the river as an entrance into Eastern Africa. It has a sandy bottom [three quarters of a mile broad] and partakes much of the character of the Zambesi. Unlike that river with its abominable bars, it flows into a magnificent bay, and

the only danger in its mile wide mouth  
is a sort of "bore" formed by the  
water of the river a few fathoms  
meeting the ocean tide of nineteen fathoms.  
At full tide it is all smooth. By keeping  
near the shore it is quite safe at all  
periods of the tide. We have a very  
short delta and the land rises up from  
the banks in a gentle slope to 300 or 400  
feet. It is well wooded the ebony  
attaining a much larger size than it  
does anywhere on the Zambesi. The  
country is very beautiful but there is  
something wrong among the people.  
Food seemed scarce in a soil where  
everything could grow. Half caste Arabs  
appear to lord it over the general population  
and they were inclined to do the same  
with us. When my brother took the Makololo  
on shore to cut wood some of them came  
and assumed the airs we read of in  
[0003]

in countries further North. They demanded  
payment for the wood and he offered to  
give it provided that they should cut it.  
But no, they would seize that already cut,  
the Makololo were unarmed but made  
a rush to their arms. "They would not  
let their white men be imposed on" the  
bastards made a rush the other way,  
and could scarcely be prevailed on to  
come back and take up the vegetables  
they had left behind. But for this little  
shew of pluck we should have had the  
company of these half castes at every  
village. Fines levied on every possible  
pretext, and the word passed on beyond  
their beat that we were a herd of she asses  
to be milked for the public benefit. It is of the utmost importance here, as in Europe  
for the people to feel that you are not dependant  
on them. If they see that you can get on  
without them they are much more obliging  
you could not have done a wiser deed  
than give my friend Captain Speke the  
Hottentot gaurd. If they [continue stead fast and]escape fever,  
which is rather doubtful as people of colour  
are as liable to it as whites, his opinion  
of the general population will be raised  
about 300 per cent. I have always  
found that the presence of a trusty band  
of Makololo, though useless for ship

work, was invaluable on land. It  
was not without considerable regret  
[0004]  
that we gave up the project of a land  
journey with them up the Rovuma.  
It was the worst season for travelling,  
rain, and heavy dews would have  
cut us up. In fact the same reasons  
that prevailed for the postponement  
of the landing of the Mission still con-  
tinued in force. By the time we reach  
the Shire we shall be back in the healthier  
season, and a beginning will be made  
of the general labours from the other  
end of Nyassa to that we looked  
on by the Rovuma. It is curious  
that all the people declare that Ny Rovuma  
comes out of Nyassa. This, according to  
a curious idea that has come over the  
geographical mind in England, must  
mean that Nyassa comes out [of] Rovuma  
I wish our good friends would only  
tell us all about it beforehand. It would  
save us a great deal of trouble. And  
deliver us from the perplexity of guessing  
and grumbling. We see for instance  
Shire never discolours in flood, but is  
always of a dark mossy hue = carries  
a great deal of mica, [has a muddy bottom]and never rises  
or falls more than a few feet. Rovuma rises some five or six feet - is very brown  
& muddy, but has a sandy bottom. Water  
carries little or no mica, and tastes of  
rain rather than moss. Now anything positive  
if given beforehand will be thankfully recieved  
though it comes from the Archives of Prester John  
[0005]

P.S. Johanna, at W<sup>m</sup> Sunley's  
H. M. Consul, Comoro Islands.

We require two well trained strong  
mules fit for and used to either  
harness or the saddle.  
And two  
good strong Scotch carts with  
harness &c complete to transport  
goods past Murchison's Cataracts.  
And I have to beg you to place  
the matter in proper hands  
paying what may [reasonably] be necessary  
on account of the Expedition.

Mr Frederick Rutherford  
might be a proper person  
but I don't know whether  
he undertakes these sort of  
matters - there is plenty of time  
as we expect them to meet  
us by a man of war which  
we beg may be sent to meet  
us at Kongone on the 1<sup>st</sup>  
January 1862. We shall not,  
indeed cannot return to the  
sea till then.

If a small steamer we  
expect comes before that  
[0006]  
and the bishops sisters should  
wish to come by that opportunity  
I shall be glad if you instruct  
the person in charge to afford  
every facility to any one con-  
nected with the mission in his  
power - either by coming up  
to the Pioneer at Chibisa's  
or Dakanamoio island and  
offloading, then returning for  
all their luggage or acting in  
anyway that may be seen most  
serviceable to the general interests.  
I should like now to see my own  
wife appear on the scene but  
we have a tough bit of work  
in getting up a boat and examining  
Nyassa, and Rovuma as the  
Anatomical lecturers say "from above  
downwards and from before  
backwards" - What do you say 3 to 1 for Rovuma  
out of Tanganyika against &c &c

About the mules I sometimes  
think a horse & mare for breeding  
purposes might be preferable but  
we might stumble into tsetse and then  
everybody will say "why we knew that"  
"I told you so."  
[0007]

I propose to submit a spot near  
the village marked "Chizunze's" not  
far from the bottom of Zomba  
for the bishop's inspection the

head man called Chibaba is a  
fat frank jolly fellow - the  
elevation some 3000 or 4000  
feet above the sea, cool in the  
hottest part of the season, and  
well watered. This will be a  
sanatorium, and there stands  
Zomba's top a day's journey up -  
inhabited - and a fine rivulet.  
If they become sick there they had  
better make their wells at once  
and not bother the doctors - Some  
work will be required to find a  
good sloping klooff up to the  
first Plateau. All have had  
fever except one. Indeed but two  
[of the entire expedition] have escaped yet nothing serious  
occurred.

You remember when every Cape  
Paper contained the great Word  
"Mazzepa". From flaring in print  
she has come down to carrying  
[0008]

slaves. We found her here with sixty  
on board bought at Kilwa (Quiloa) on  
the East Coast at 22 dollars per head  
then, the owner gave 250 dollars to  
a chief on Comoro island to furnish  
him with certificate that the slaves  
were his own people lent as free  
emigrants. It is here scarcely thought  
necessary to conceal the nature of these  
transactions, there is constant intercourse  
between the islands & the chief is rather  
admired for the amount he extracted,  
but the French Government Official  
is on board and it is illegal to  
touch her. What did the Emperor  
mean when he said that he would  
not have the slave trade at any  
price?

I am &c

David Livingstone