

Letter to Henry Rawlinson, [January?] 1873

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

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South Central Africa

1873

My Dear Sir Henry

I have felt ever since I left Unyanyembe on this my concluding trip that I expressed very inadequately the gratitude that welled up in my heart to you and all the promoters of the search & Relief expedition, but I was so overjoyed by finding that M^r Stanley had promptly procured fifty five men and what additional goods I needed to finish all I proposed to do, that I was more like a boy going home from school than the staid toothless old fogie I find myself to be. Whatever you may have thought was lacking you are too much of a traveller yourself to pass a very heavy judgement on me, for verily I did feel, and do feel extremely grateful to you all. I was a little sorry that a strong dose of the cheap nostrum called "good advice" the gallant athletes chose to wait for the cessation of the rains, for remaining on a most unhealthy and awfully stinking island all their good intentions oozed out at their finger ends, and I had no opportunity of bringing to their notice the very important service of exploring the Lake system of the Victoria Nyanza. I certainly did not need them for my work - they would have "resigned" a naval phrase for "going on strike" before they waded through half the water I have been obliged to ford around Lake Bangweolo and unanimously voted me to be a beast deserving death or as articles of War say some worse punishment. I dont know who gave the good advice, but Stanley went off at the beginning of the heavy rains, and after knowing their worst coolly elected to go through all the Masika again in order to hasten up the men and goods I so much needed. I left in the middle of the Masika too for the reason that I had my English stock of robust health with which to battle against the pelting rains. I have had another spell of Masika on the watershed - the worst I ever endured for the cold

Nor-West stratum again thick with clouds lay like a wet blanket on all that upland forest land. For three months I could not get an astronomical observation except a [few] snap latitudes. Was led down to the back or northern side of Bangweolo and near its Western end. Had to plod away to the south-east through riverine meshes each thread from half a mile to three miles broad - deep and encumbered with great masses of aquatic vegetation. Branches come out

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of the larger streams and flow over endless slightly depressed valleys, among four or five species of rushes - among three species of Lotus or sacred lilly plants - Papyrus plants and many other plants that grow only in water - very much as other rivers near the coast flow in branches among mud and mangroves - some of these deltas of aquatic vegetation are from forty to fifty miles long and too broad to be seen over, but only grassy seas with anthill islands having trees at great distances from each other - no one but an eye witness could imagine the vast amount of water in the country. Six rivers of Cam or Isis size flow from the south - they rise in the ridge of the watershed, or not so far off, that overlooks the deep valley of the Loangwa of [Zumbo]. The shores of the Lake and for days out are remarkable only for extreme flatness. When I visited it in the dry season there was generally no more slope to it than there is from the Isle of Dogs down to the Thames. Now it is nearly impossible to tell where land ends and lake begins. some one, overcome by the fascination of describing unknown ~~described~~[said that] it as like Nyassa Tanganyika & the Albert Nyanza overhung by high mountain slopes that open out into bays & valleys. The only slopes I saw were those of anthills which may be called high if thought of as perched on the general altitude of about 4000 feet. This seems to be the head of one main line of drainage of the Nile - but I am not positive till I meet with Baker and for that meeting I do most intensely long. I was not aware till M^r Stanley came that a letter that succeeded one of 1868 from near Bangweolo, had been destroyed - the three head men of the caravan that carried the Bangewolo letter were slain by a tribe in the way but the survivors carried it on safely to Zanzibar. Following Luapula down through Moero I saw the vast rent in the lofty black mountains of Rua through which the Lualaba finds its birth, and I went three days round the end of these Rua mountains and saw

Lualaba coming out of the same fissure and flowing away to the Nor-West. the drainage clearly did not go into Tanganyika, and [that] lake though it probably has an outlet lost all its interest to me as a source of the river of Egypt. I wrote to this effect in Dec^r 1868 but it never went beyond the Governor of Unyanyembe. I

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was amused to find that geographers had been bamboozled most unmercifully by the Arab palaver that Nile flowed out of [Tanganyika's] Northern end - that it was distinctly brackish in shut [in] bays, and perfectly sweet out in the main stream, though rivers from whose banks, as the Malagarasi, enormous quantities of salt are daily taken, have been flowing in for ages - that like all great rivers in this country having North and South reaches it was fast wearing away its eastern bank - the village of Ujiji for instance stands a full mile east of where it stood in the [now deep] water in the memory of persons still living - that several palm oil palms now stand out fifty yards from the Ujiji village [shore] where they could not have grown had water been there when they were young - and many other land trees now stand in the water in the same circumstances - these reasons made me form an opinion that it had an outlet and I unwisely mentioned that opinion in a private letter. We did not find an outlet in the North, though an Arab asserted within one days sail of the Lusize that positively Tanganyika water ran out by it and not in it. He was not ashamed when told to look at it.

Knowing where the main drainage went I worked at it though without men and means and then got Banian slaves, the worst of all slaves, and about £4 out of £500 or £600 worth of goods. It was gratifying to see incidentally in some paper that Keith Johnstone who ought to be called "Secundus" for he has the genuine geographical acumen of Keith Johnstone "Primus" had without knowing the rent in the Rua (not Ruwa or Uruwa) Mountains reasoned out the drainage from Bangweolo as going NW - as I found it and as I often feared went thence to the Congo. My reckoning made it flowing 24° to 25° East - and no wonder the dense dark forests of Manyema would puzzle anything except a gorillah or soko. By a patent process, I succeeded

in squeezing a longitude out of a dead chronometer and that made it flow in 27^o nearly.

The same process made the North end of Tanganyika nearly the [same] as Speke's.

It is interesting to find [an offer] made to the Government to supersede [me] by running up to the end of Tanganyika & to call me out of Manyema

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where Arab palaver said I was "living like an Arab"

My discovery shews that I alone knew what I was about, and the other [plan] than a search & relief expedition about which you did not enquire would have shewn the unwisdom of believing Arabs who are the least reliable of all informants. I wish it to be especially understood that I twice sent copies of all my astronomical observations - with sketch maps - and as opportunities presented themselves pretty full consecutive accounts of all my work for the Foreign Office and you. but not a letter was suffered to pass the members of a slaving coterie or Ring of which Ludha Dsmji was the head & chief money lender at Zanzibar, and Syde bin Salem, the governor of Unanyembe was the chief inland. One letter alone escaped. It went off in company with a large packet of observations, Despatches & letters but in the hands of a buffalo driver who wisely secreted it on his person in the belief that on its production his wages depended. All else were destroyed though I explained to governor that the packet contained despatches which his Sultan desired to be sent on with great care. Evidence that Syde bin Salem had by his slave Salum plundered my caravan was not to be allowed to go to the coast - and so of the plundering by Thani bin Abdullah and Shereef, and they were successful - and because these wretches destroyed my correspondence M^r Murray of the Foreign Office stopped my salary - a very unEnglish deed to be laid at the door of the English Government. the slaves did their utmost to prevent Stanley going to aid me and when he went with their army to try & get past the rebel Mirambo, governor cut and ran. This was promptly enough reported as "Stanley in a difficulty" in hopes of getting him recalled and it led to the S & R Expedition - no prompt report was made of my presence at Ujiji though Governor acknowledged that he had recieved two despatches from me there written immediately after my arrival. Stanley learned of my presence only at the Malagarassi close to Ujiji. not only was information burked on its way to you - by notes put into Arab packets being

abstracted, but they gave only what was convenient to
H M Vice Consul. and when the two heads of the Ring
were entrusted with stores and men for me the result
might have been anticipated. I think that the plunderers
or their [estates] ought to refund as was done in the case
of Baron [von der] Decken but this may not be agreeable
to their friends - meanwhile we shall see

Yours &c. David Livingstone.