

Letter to Heinrich Barth

Livingstone, David, 1813-1873

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)

[0001]

H.M. Exploring Ship Pioneer

R. Zambesi 18th Feby 1862

My Dear Dr. Barth

your very welcome letter of July 1861 reached me at the same time that a steamer for Lake Nyassa did, and as we are carrying it up towards its destination I snatch a few moments to acknowledge your kind remembrance of a fellow explorer. We shall be engaged at least twelve months in carrying the piece of the steamer past the cataracts - they extend over 35 miles of latitude, and the descent of the river in that space amounts to 1200 feet. But we must disembark before we reach them and on land carriage will not be less than 70 or 80 miles - the Shire above the cataracts is all smooth and deep -. We carried a boat up in August last and when we launched her above the uppermost cataract were upon the Lake for we sailed easily into Nyassa on the 2^d september. It is a very deep Lake and very surrounded on all sides by mountains & highlands it is subject to sudden and dangerous storms - our sounding line was only 35 fathoms on 210 feet. That seldom reached the bottom 2 miles from the shore, and in the North we could feel no bottom with a fishing line of 690 feet. We coasted along the western shore and found the length to be over 200 miles long. It begins in Lat. 14° 25' S. and to the southern borders of the tenth degree of south Lat. The shape is somewhat like the boot shape of Italy but the toe [from] which hire flows turned the other way: The ankle is the narrowest part = 18 or 20 miles but in the North it is 50 or 60. We did not succeed in the object we set out to accomplish namely, to ascertain about the river Rovuma - if it can be a pathway out. It was mortifying but we returned

[0002]

about as wise as we went. One man would declare that we might sail out of the Lake into the river another that we must carry the boat a few yards - another, fifty miles or a month; and we dared not cross over to ascertain for ourselves, for three [out] of the four storms we witnessed would have swamped our little boat. We might have gone round the Northern end as the people told us that they did, but war had depopulated the country North of Lat. 11° 40' and no food could be obtained. We were forced back by hunger, and slinging our boat to a branch of a lofty and shady tree above the uppermost cataract reached the ship after three months absence.

The Lake has several small round rocky islands in it. All are destitute of inhabitants except one - It rises and falls with the wet and dry seasons about 3 feet. The water is fresh & cool - it abounds in fish and a ~~layer~~[larger] population, than I have seen anywhere else, lives on its shores. Slaving is the only trade known, and an Arab dhow(?) has lately been built on its shores to carry slaves across. It fled from us twice. About 19,000 slaves pass annually through the custom house of Zanzibar, and the greater part of these come from the Nyassa and the valley of the Shire. I earnestly hope that I may live to do something to stop this gigantic evil. When on the lake with our steamer "Lady Nyassa" or as i like to call her, the "Lady of the Lake", we shall have easy access to over 300 miles of cotton producing country. A minister of the Free church of Scotland is now with us with a view to obtaining information for the establishment of a christian Mission on the lake or adjacent highlands .

[0003]

I have recommended him to go up with us and see for himself. The people seemed to us to be civil, no fines were levied nor dues demanded and I have no doubt but in the course of a number of years patient and labourious missionaries will see fruits of their labours.

You will have heard that we have a church of England Mission on the Manganja highlands East Murchisons cataracts. I went up with the bishop to introduce him to the people and shew him a healthy locality . We found that the Portuguese had set up an extensive system of slave hunting. The first party we met had (84) eightyfour women & children bound together. While making enquiries among these poor people the adventurers fled into the forest, and left the whole on my hands - so I thought the best thing I could do with them was to hand over that party and some others to the bishop to begin school with. The slave hunters had employed another tribe called to attack the Manganja villages, kill the men & sell the women and children to them. After seeing the spot selected for the mission we went to try to induce the Ajawa to cease the shedding of blood - came to them when in the act of burning three villages and were attacked with muskets & arrows. This was my first hostile encounter in Africa. Though often on the point of it - I am sorry that it took place - we drove them off but had I in the least anticipated aught of the sort I would have made [use of] presents and fair words before going near them. We acted in self-defensive[defence] alone but while we were in Nyassa the bishop and missionaries took the offensive and drove away a tribe of [these]Ajawa. I am extremely sorry that they did this for though defen-

[0004] sive war may be lawful, offensive war cannot be right on the party of a bishop. It is the first time that this party has engaged in mission work. You may know that they are called "High Church" I approved heartily of their coming out here and still I think that that they will be useful , for High Churchism can only flourish in seclusion, and when good people engage in active benevolence

the bigotry of the closet and cloister must . The bishop is a very good man and so are most of his associators. We may therefore hope that despite this false step success may attend their efforts.

What a hard hearted man you are - I publish another book - No, No - one book in a man's life is quite enough. How you got through five volumes is more than I can tell. Sir Roderick Murchison set me to write once, and I did not like to be beaten, but he may as well tell me to stand on my head as write another. You will excuse the foregoing few notes as all I can give at present. My wife is here so not a word to any one till the steamer is on the Lake.

Yours most truly

David Livingstone