

## Letter to George Grey, 15 October 1859

*Livingstone, David, 1813-1873*

Published by Livingstone Online (livingstoneonline.org)  
[0001]

River Shire 15° 55' Lat. S.

15<sup>th</sup> Oct<sup>r</sup> 1859

Private

My Dear Sir George

We have found an opening in a direction we never expected for we find that this river really comes out of [the hitherto undiscovered Lake] Nyassa one of those Lakes with which Africa is studded. We traced the Shire up to the point of departure in 14 · 25' S. lat and we found that there are only 33 miles of cataracts above this point when the river becomes placid again and continues so right into the Lake. From Kongone Harbour to this ( Murchison's cataract) we have at least a two fathom channel all the year for Shire never varies more than from 2 to 3 feet between the dry and wet seasons - And the Lake itself never varies more, if so much, so it must be large, and well fed. We could not explore it, because we had left Macgregor's Laird's precious punt in a sinking state. Funnel - Furnace Deck & Bottom all went done simultaneously after only 12 months wear.

[0002]

Nor could we get any information as to "how far off its head lay." Shirwa or as its name is Tamandua is ninety miles long. Shirwa means great water only and is applied to the sea. We have opened a cotton field of unknown extent and superior to the American inasmuch as there are no frosts to cut off the crop, and instead of the endless labour in America, one sowing of Foreign seed already introduced by the natives, yields for three years. The land beyond the

cataracts lies in three terraces. The Shire valley being the lower one is about 1200 feet high - a second East of this & three miles broad is over 2000 while a third still East & over twelve miles broad is upwards of 3000 feet at its Western edge, or about equal to your Table mountain. On this terrace rises Mount Zomba which in round numbers maybe called between 7000 & 8000 feet high. Our encampment on its southern edge was nearly 7000 and D<sup>r</sup> Kirk in botanizing ascended the S.W. peak about a mile distant and found it some 400 or 500 above the camp. We travelled in the hottest season of the year that called in west Africa "the smokes"

[0003]

when from the burning of immense tracts of country covered with tall grass the atmosphere is a thick haze all around. It was very hot in the valley but when we ascended to the second terrace the air was refreshing. And on the third it was delightful while on Zomba it was cold. The terraces are wonderfully well supplied with running rills of deliciously cool water, and cotton is grown very extensively every where. On Zomba itself there is a large valley with a fine stream and much cultivation though not of cotton. I mention these peculiarities in the physical conformation of the country that you may perceive we have changes of climate within a few miles of each other. These, for keeping people well, and I think one of the greatest benefits this Expedition will confer is the speedy cure of fever even in the lowlands without, in general, loss of strength to the patient. The land beyond Zomba contracts between Shire and Nyassa or Nyinyesi into a narrow isthmus, and the trade from the interior passes along this isthmus. We met a

[0004]

a large East coast slaving party with an immense number of slaves on elephants tusks - We bought some fine specimens of Malachite from them which they had got in Cazamebe's country. They were the

most blackgaurd[looking] lot I ever saw and  
that is saying a great deal seeing I lived  
long beyond the colony. They seemed to  
get into a panic when they knew we were  
English for by night they evaporated. Probably  
they had the same opinion of us as we had of them.

Confidential All the trade for a large tract  
of East Coast passes along the Isthmus and  
we propose an English station there, but  
the Portuguese would be up in arms did  
they know. We could with ease cut off  
much of the slave trade for Mozambique the Augoxia river & other ports and  
a plan is sent home to Government  
for the purpose. A common road  
could with ease be made past the cataracts  
and a steamer placed on the Lake - not  
a Macgregor Laird's sham but a good  
one screwed together at home in a work-  
manlike manner. We must have English  
colonization. I have no doubt as to  
its success had we a man like you  
to set it agoing

David Livingstone